

NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 6, No. 1

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STRANGE CHOICE OF ROOST BY CROWS

By

K.K. Neelakantan

That crows, mynas, house sparrows and parakeets prefer to roost in larger numbers in trees standing in the middle of crowded bazars is wellknown, but I used to think that this was due to the absence of more suitable roosts near by. A recent experience makes me wonder whether these birds deliberately choose trees in the heart of the town.

Towards the end of the third week of November I was passing through Shoranur (central Kerala) at 11 p.m. It was a dark night. The spot where we had stopped was at the very centre of this small town, not far from the Railway Station and close to a hotel which is open all night. It is also the town bus stand, and till about 10 p.m. is full of bustle. Throughout the night lorries and buses stop there and small, noisy crowds.

from dusk to dawn. Yet a clump of Pongania trees standing under a street lamp and in the glare of the fluorescent lights of the hotel sign was full of crows. Those I saw clearly were all House Crows. They sat without any attempt at concealment, and could easily be seen by people. There were innumerable trees, much taller and larger than the Pongania-s everywhere in the town, but the crows had chosedn to roost in the 'lime light'.

I was surprised to find that some of the crows were calling, some moving from twig to twig, and a few every now and then flying up 50 to 60 ft. into the darkness overhead. Few of these last were seen returning to their perches. One crow sat across an electric wire, calmly preening!

It was evident from the large and extensive patches of droppings under the trees and the white coating most of the leaves had received that the roost had been in regular use for a long time.

I believe that many kinds of birds prefer to roost in trees close to man's dwellings. I have found Tree Pies, Blackheaded Orioles, Tailor Birds, Ioras, Whitebrowed Bulbuls, Paradise Flycatchers, Crow-pheasants and Whitebreasted Kingfishers preferring roosts close to the roof. In the Thekkady Game Sanctuary I found large numbers of Grey Wagtails coming from the surrounding forest to a tree near the rest house to roost. Also the trees near Aranya Nivas were extremely popular as roosts. Obviously the proximity of human beings affords some security to the birds from certain kinds of predators, though I should think that this would be more than set off by the danger from domestic cats. Perhaps the crows of Shoranur were also impelled by this instinct to roost where the constant presence of human beings gave them a feeling of security.

But those crows which occupied branches close to the road must have spent very disturbed night. Some of them were behaving as though the sun had risen! Did these crows deliberately occupy perches where sleep would be impossible, or were they the late-comers who could not find better accommodation?

Do crows habitually prefer a grove of spreading trees -- such as mango, banyan, etc. -- or, do they quite often spend the night scattered about over a larger area in coconut and other trees? In Trivandrum there are still very well-wooded patches with large spreading trees. But I find that at one place crows seem to sleep in small numbers on various coconut trees. This roost is not at all a spectacular one, and I discovered that quite a few crows were spending the night here only because on a number of occasions I happened to hear crows calling from various trees well before sunrise and when crows had not begun to fly about. It should be mentioned that these crows were heard during the non-breeding season, and so such a large number could not have been occupying nests in that area.

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## BIRD VOCATIONS

By

Mrs. Jamal Ara

Nowhere in the world is there another bird which can claim more dexterity than the Indian Tailor Bird, which sew together leaves to form a receptacle for their nesting materials.

Master artisans as they are, they make fairy tales come true by thousands each summer, when they roll spider's webs around their small beaks, and using it as thread do their sewing. Along the edges of the leaf they puncture a series of holes with their beaks, and then thread these holes with the gathered cobwebs or the fibres using their beaks as needles. They work very quickly with uncanny skill, the hen-bird inside and her mate outside. One pushes the thread through a hole; the other catches it and pushes it back through the next hole. The thread is then pulled tight and fastened. When the nest is finally complete, the birds go over their work again and put in additional stitches where there is a possible weakness in the structure.

Next to the Tailor Bird in craftsmanship is the Weaver Bird or Baya, which combines the functions of a weaver as well as basket maker. This small seed eater usually hangs its nest from the branches of a tree overhanging a stream. The nest is built exclusively by the male. The light nest, elaborately woven of grass or strips of leaves, is weighted with lumps of clay to prevent it from swaying in the breeze.

These two are well known. But there is a third, the Ashy Wren-Warbler, which, not satisfied with one type of nest, builds three different kinds, and is a master at the construction of each. His first is the same as that of the Tailor Bird, and the Ashy Wren-Warbler proves himself a better craftsman at this type of construction as well. In addition he builds a substantial oval-domed affair with the entrance on one side.

Plastering is done by many birds, but the most remarkable piece of work is the one done by the Hornbill. As soon as the hen lays her eggs in the hollow of a tree, she imprisons herself in it by walling up the entrance with her droppings using the flat sides of her large bill as a trowel, and leaving only a narrow aperture through which the male feeds her. The skill with which the wall is constructed is that of a mason. She remains a prisoner there until the chicks are hatched, when she emerges by breaking down the wall, but rebuilds it at once. During her imprisonment, the male works hard to feed her. He brings food to her incubating prison, taps at the entrance, and feeds her when she puts her head out of the opening.

The Chestnutbellied Nuthatch, which nests in tree holes, also plasters the opening, reducing it to a tiny round one, through which it can squeeze its body. The female, however, does not imprison herself in this case. The House Swift mixes small particles caught in flight, particularly feathers, with its own saliva to make cup or saucer shaped nests plastered against walls or under the eaves of houses.

The bird names Kingfisher and Woodpecker remind one of human vocations. The Kingfisher, specially the pied variety, hovers over water and then dives straight down to catch fish. It has, however, another vocation, that of a miner. It excavates in river banks tunnels up to seven feet long and nests there. Another miner is the Bank Myna, which is to be found in the riverine sandy tracts of big rivers. This also burrows deep in river banks, and also tunnels intercommunicating 'Tube ways' to link one nest with another.

The above list is not exhaustive, but merely indicates the different vocations practised by the artisans of the Indian birdland.

## A COPPERSMITH'S BROOD

By

V. Ravi

A pair of Coppersmiths nested in an almond tree early in the year and raised a brood by March. The failure of that brood with the death of young birds was followed by a second brood.

A week after the fledgling of the previous brood there appeared the first egg of the second brood. One day before it was laid we observed the mating; as the male mounted the female it made a peculiar noise; then he fed her; once a neem fruit was given.

Only two eggs were laid on two successive days -- on 31st March and the 1st of April. There was rain on both days, and the female had to spend long in brooding them. The incubation was an affair of 17 days. The female was on duty most of the time, the male once in a while only.

In the first days the incubation was done in stretches of considerable periods (20 to 40 minutes each time) at the end of which the bird would come to the orange tree close by to preen and rest, the female occasionally visited the peepal tree where the male dwelt. In each stretch again there were breaks for usually 2 to 3 minutes and possibly more. During these breaks the bird used to come only to the entrance of the nest. When the weather was cloudy and cool the incubation was done in irregular periods; sometimes it was only 1 or 2 minutes and at other times more than 20 minutes. In the last days the spells of incubation were comparatively much shorter.

In the table that follows a record of incubation is given, based on regular observations made for reasonable periods at suitable times. We have shown the record of some days, not of all the days on which observations were made.

Incubation by the female bird. The letter E with Serial Nos. 1, 2, etc. indicates the days which elapsed since the laying of the first egg.

| Days | Time               | No. of spells | Duration of incubation in each spell | Total length of incubation time on each day |
|------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| E4   | 60 minutes morning | 3             | 7, 7, 17½                            | 31½   |
| E6   | 20 minutes morning | 4             | 1, 1½, 1, 11                         | 14½   |
| E8   | 25 minutes evening | 4             | 1, 1, 6, 10                          | 18  |
| E11  | 32 minutes morning | 5             | 2, 2, 3, 2, 12                       | 18½   |
| E13  | 30 minutes morning | 5             | 8, 3, 4, 2, 3                        | 20  |
| E15  | 54 minutes evening | 10            | 3, 1, 1, 4, 1, 1, 1, 3, 3, 6         | 23  |
| E17  | 21 minutes morning | 3             | 3, 3, 3                              | 9   |

The nest bed was softened by pecking out the wood; no foreign material was added as a lining.

On the 13th day of the incubation the female appeared at the entrance of the nest holding a downy feather in its bill early in the morning.

On the day previous to the hatching of eggs the male, which was all along absent, was noticeable near the nest.

Feeding started on the 17th April with two young birds to be fed. In the first few days the chicks were given a diet of peepal berries. The female was attending on the brood constant-ly. In the early days sometimes the bird used to keep the babies warm by brooding. It rained one evening and the female sat in the nest brooding the chicks without feeding them. Actually every day from 6 p.m. onwards no feeding took place though there was half-an-hour of daylight. At that time the bird would sit preening itself, spending its time there on the orange tree. By 6.40 the bird had gone to sleep.

The droppings of the chicks were from time to time collected and carried outside. It was usually the lot of the female to scavenge; at times the male too took a turn at the work. The hen-bird always gave a final clean-up before settling for the night.

The rate of feeding went on at an increasing pace. In the second week the fare was diversified a good bit by the addition of ripened neem fruits, which were available in plenty by then. At the same time the peepal tree (the headquarters of the pair) which was also fruiting abundantly provided an added supply of food.

On the 11th day the two chicks were still naked. At noon they might be sleeping, as the parents brought no food. The adults outside had an anxious time all that day, because the security of their nest was in danger. Two other coppersmiths had newly arrived in the neighbourhood, and were trying to nest. The newcomers gave a lot of trouble and set up a lot of noise. On the next two days one bird approached the nest but was soon driven away. On the 15th May (the 4th week) the feeding was in progress by 6 a.m. early in the morning.

Finally, after five weeks, the two young birds fledged; and on the 21st May they disappeared from the nest. On the night previous there had been quite a storm. We even feared that the brood had perished. The young birds were nowhere outside. And there was rain water in the nest. Later, however, we found the chicks alive. They were presumably taken to the peepal tree. One chick used to accompany its mother during the latter's occasional visits to the nest. The female is still keeping in touch with the nest, often sleeping in it at night.

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# WATCHING THE NEST BUILDING OF A PAIR OF HOUSE SPARROWS IN MARCH AND APRIL 1965

By

Kameshwar Pal Singh

[Readers may recall that some time ago birdwatchers were asked to concentrate on studying the life history of the House Sparrow. The following article and the note in the Correspondence Section have been received in response to the appeal - Ed.]

The nest was situated at a height of 7 ft. from the ground behind a picture hanging on the wall. Although the nest building was done mainly by the male he was helped occasionally by the female. The nest materials were generally dry grass, hay, paper pieces, cotton, and jute pieces. The clutch consisted of four eggs and they were laid even before the nest was quite ready. The first egg was laid on the 3rd March, the second on the 4th, the third on the 5th, and the fourth on the 6th. The female brooded both in the daytime and at night. The male always brought some tit-bits to repair the nest and it also guarded the nest in the absence of the female. The upper opening of the nest was closed 3 or 4 days after the laying of eggs. The nest was repaired even upto 10 days after the laying of the eggs.

The eggs hatched on the 16th and 17th March after 12 or 15 days. Once I put my hand ~~xxxx~~ inside the nest in the presence of the female. It flew away and came only when the male accompanied it and the male visited the nest first as if to make it sure that there was no danger. The feeding of the chicks was done by both parents. I think the male takes a fairly prominent part in feeding the chicks. For the first few days the diet consisted entirely of grubs. At night the female remained in the nest and the male sat on the cornice of the ceiling. The chicks were almost double their size on the 4th day. Wing quills began to appear on the 7th day. On the 10th day the eyes opened and by the 14th day body feathers developed except for the primaries. On the last few days the diet consisted mainly of grains, insects, and grubs. Grain generally rice and wheat were freely used in feeding the chicks at least 4 or 5 days before leaving the nest. By the 5th April almost all the fledglings left the nest. But only two could be traced in the near-by bush. The one flew by itself and I helped the other to go to the near-by bush. The fledglings remained in the bush for 5 or 6 days. They were fed there by both the parents.

The birds were again seen mating on 10th April. The second brood was raised in the same nest after minor repairs. A clutch of 4 eggs was laid between the 15th and 17th April. The eggs hatched on the 27th and 28th April. The female was caught and coloured on 30th April. It did not return to the nest that day but the next day it was again seen feeding the chicks. On the 16th May when the nest was examined, it was found empty. It cannot be ascertained how the chicks disappeared, since there was no chance of any marauders like cats or other predators.

When I examined the empty nest carefully, I found that it contained two skeletons of chicks from the first brood and the

the partly decayed body of a chick from the second brood. This explained why only two fledglings were found in the first brood. But it still remains a mystery where and how the chicks of the second brood disappeared.

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EXTRACTS FROM 'FOUR AGAINST EVEREST', BY WOODROW  
WILSON SAYRE (Arthur Barker, London 1961). Commu-  
nicated by R.E. Hawkins

pp. 115-16

Ever since Camp I several large, black, raven-like birds had followed our progress and scavenged our camps. I have no idea what they normally eat at these altitudes, since we saw nothing else living. But they certainly read the sign "meal-ticket" written across our backs. One or two were always in sight. Apparently we had underestimated them badly. They went right through the burlap sacks and the plastic bags in our cache with their beaks. Our food was scattered all over. Their favourite was the meat bars. We could ill afford the loss of these precious supplies, transported with such effort so far. We salvaged what we could and piled rocks on top to frustrate any future efforts. And then I started worrying about our essential cache at Camp II. It was not protected by rocks. The ravens were squatting all around us as we left. This could be a disaster. Our only hope was that, luckily, we had stored the food in the canvas marine sacks, and so far they had not pecked through these much tougher containers.

p. 120

After making our cache, we all moved the tents up the East Rongbuk, about an hour's walk beyond the cache of yesterday. We were chagrined to find the cache broken into and scattered. Norm feared some type of rodent. We tried to make a rodent-proof sanctuary of fitted rocks. But it was obviously impossible. Then I reflected that there weren't supposed to be any rodents up here anyway. It was probably the ravens again. They were strong and they could knock down the lighter rocks. Their long beaks can poke through the holes. So we used really heavy rocks and we made double walls. It turned out that these in fact were successful. But we had lost some more food.

[The first extract refers to a cache on the West Rongbuk glacier, c. 20,000 ft., and the second to a point about 21,000 ft. Both were within about 20 km. of the Rongbuk Monastery in Tibet.

But Camp I was on the west side of the Nup La, rather more than 20 km. from any village.]

#### Review

WHERE EVERY PROSPECT'S VILE. By W.H. Thorpe, F.R.S. (Hansish Hamilton). Price 25s.

(From The Observer - Weekend Review dated 17 Feb. 1963)

A Swiss chemist received the Nobel Prize for Medicine for discovering, in 1939, the outstanding properties of D.D.T. as an insecticide. As a result of this discovery, many insect-borne

diseases, for example typhus and malaria, became controllable and were even eradicated in some areas. Untold numbers of human lives were saved and the yield of many crops was greatly increased.

It was at first widely stated and believed that D.D.T. was quite harmless to man and to all other vertebrates, whether fish, mice, cattle or birds. In due course further similar compounds such as aldrin, dieldrin and heptachlor, all of them "chlorinated hydrocarbons", were produced. These have an even more powerful effect as insecticides. Then it was found that D.D.T. was harmless to many only when used in powder form, which is not absorbed through the skin. When in solution or when swallowed, all these substances are definitely poisonous to higher animals of all kinds.

Next a most sinister discovery was made: not only are these poisons absorbed, but instead of being excreted again as are many other poisons, they are retained, and accumulate indefinitely in human and animal bodies. This happens particularly in those organs which contain a good deal of fat -- the adrenals, the testes, the liver, the kidneys and the nervous system. The daily dose, however minute, inexorably piles up. When we put these substances on our farms and gardens, insects are killed or immobilised, and organic compounds in the soil retain the poisons.

The earthworms get their ration, and the birds get larger doses still from eating them, or the insects, or both. So birds and many mammals in their turn become sick. Trembling and confused, they fall an easy prey to hawks, owls and foxes which thus get even larger doses, often with a spectacular mortality over wide areas of countryside -- as has happened in the United States and to a lesser degree in this country. Those birds which are not killed swiftly often survive apparently unharmed, but infertile, laying sterile eggs. It is the same story (with minor variations as to the route of contamination) with man's farm animals, game birds and domestic pets. So man himself begins to store his pesticides in his own body, getting them from milk and butter, from meat, from sprayed vegetation and from stored grain.

Whether the dose we are yet getting is nearing any danger level is still in debate, but that it will reach this level in due course if we continue using these substances as in the past cannot be doubted. Some of these materials are implicated as probable cancer-causing agencies, and there are other grave effects. The end result could be a tragedy vastly worse than that due to thalidomide.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Mother Sparrow teaches chick to fly.

November 20, 1965, evening 5.30 to 5.35, the verandah before my room which is about 20 yards from the main Kurla Road, Andheri East.

A sparrow chick fluttered down squeaking on the verandah floor a couple of yards away from where I was sitting. And in an instant its mother came down quietly and stood beak-to-beak with her chick. She had no food for it but she was 'acting' as if she had some which she wanted to feed it!



A robin teasing a rufousbacked shrike

On 16 June 1964, after sunset I observed a rufousbacked shrike perched on a small bush with a male robin accompanied by two females on the ground near the same bush. As soon as the shrike saw a dainty morsel it flew down to the ground to catch it. The male robin also dashed forward and tried to rob the shrike of its rightful prey. The robin did not succeed. The shrike moved on to another bush near by and the same story was repeated twice. Possibly enraged by its repeated failures the robin made a diving attack at the tail of the shrike as it was sitting perched on a bush. Beyond expressing its disapproval of the robin's misbehaviour by shrieking the shrike did not actively retaliate but indicated by its manner that it was not going to tolerate any nonsense.

V.N. Kelkar

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# NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

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Mushroom and the Bulbul. By Gift Siromoney (p.12)

## THE KENTISH PLOVER, *CHARADRIUS ALEXANDRINUS* LINNAEUS, BREEDING IN SOUTHERN MADRAS

By

Stewart Mellsuish

So little appears to be known of the breeding habits of some of the commoner but less conspicuous birds resident in India that the following record may be of interest.

Two races of the Kentish Plover, *Charadrius alexandrinus alexandrinus* and *C. a. seebohmii*, are known to be resident in the Indian area. The former's range is defined by Ripley thus, 'Breeds in West Pakistan in Sind, and India in Kutch and Saurashtra (subspecies ?), south in winter throughout the Peninsula, Nepal in the terai, and Ceylon', while *seebohmii* is regarded as a Ceylonese race, though Salim Ali (THE BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE & COCHIN, 1953) says 'it may possibly be found to breed in Travancore also'. Except for this last conjectural statement, I can find no published mention of the breeding of either race in southern India.

Kentish Plovers are common on the coast of Madras at most times of year, but the first hint I received that they might breed

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THE KENTISH PLOVER, *CHARADRIUS ALEXANDRINUS*  
LINNAEUS, BREEDING IN SOUTHERN MADRAS

By

Stewart Mellaish

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Kentish Plovers are common on the coast of Madras at most times of year, but the first hint I received that they might breed was after Zafar Futehally and I had watched a small plover,

which I had carelessly dismissed as a Lesser Sand Plover, performing wing- and tail-drooping and other decoying antics in some plough at Velacheri, a few miles south of Madras city, on 8 February 1964. Mr. Futehally later referred to Henry's GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF CEYLON, where, at page 291, there is an admirable description of the behaviour we had witnessed. We concluded that the bird seen was a Kentish Plover, but as birds in breeding condition will perform ritual acts of this kind whether they are actually breeding or not, we could not assume it was nesting.

In early May 1964, at Sadras in Chingleput district, I found a plover fledgling, which could not fly and which I was thus able to pursue and photograph at short range. A very worried adult Kentish Plover was present to witness this performance, and to confirm the fledgling's identity. Later the same day close by I saw two more adult Kentish Plovers frantically trying to decoy me away from what I could only suppose were young similar to the one I had just seen, or nests. Their tactics were successful.

I have now found a Kentish Plover's nest. I was at Kodikkarai (better known as Point Calimere) in Tanjore district on 14 January 1966, walking along the shore about a mile west of the railway station, when an adult Kentish Plover in very smart livery attracted my attention by running along the sand in front of me in a crouching posture with its wings drooping and its tail fanned out and pressed downwards. Every now and then it stopped and changed its directions, and occasionally assumed a more upright stance, folding its wings in the normal manner. After a long and tiring day plodding through the mud, and with sundown approaching, I did not feel in the least like hunting for eggs or a fledgling which might after all be purely imaginary. I had just resolved to walk on when I looked down and saw three eggs in the sand at my feet.

These were a matt khaki, blotched all over with sepia, the blotches a trifle denser at the broader ends. In shape they resembled chicken's eggs, the one I measured was approximately 32 by 22 cm. in size. They lay with their narrow ends inwards and downwards in a hollow in the sand about four inches in diameter, lined and surrounded by an untidy array of bits of broken shell. I saw no sign of an attempt to cover the eggs with fragments of shell and mud, such as Henry describes. A few tufts of grass grew round about the depression, but offered no protection to the nest in any way. The nest was 33 feet from the high-water line.

Throughout my examination of this nest the adult bird was silent, and I did not see it again; nor, it will be realised, did I see it approach or sit on the nest, but the chances of the eggs belonging to a different bird or species are, I believe, very remote. The eggs were warmer to the touch than pieces of mollusc shell lying near them and a sitting bird had clearly left them only a moment before I found them.

Calimere is a mere thirty miles from the end of the Jaffna peninsula, and it is possible that the birds there are seebornii. What seems odd is the early date. Henry wrote, 'The breeding season lasts from about March till August, but June and July appear to be the favourite months'.

Tel. 571279

Jahnu L. ne  
Anand  
Bombay 58-AS

February 2, 1966

BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA

Field Outing

Sunday, 13th February 1966

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Members and their friends are requested to meet at the Aarey  
Market at 7.30 a.m. on Sunday, 13th February. Would members  
with cars please help to bring others along.

ZAFAR FUTEHALLY

THREE WEEKS OF BIRDWATCHING IN RANIKHET  
IN AUTUMN

BY

Usha Ganguli

Ranikhet with a height of a little over 6000 ft. is a very well-wooded hill station comprising mostly Himalayan Oak, Pine, Horse Chestnut, a few Deodar, Eucalyptus and wild Cherry Trees. The eucalyptus and the wild cherry trees came into flower while I was there in Oct.-November, and the wild rose and some viburnum and other bushes were laden with ripe fruit and berries, and thus attracted a large variety of birds. I saw nearly sixty varieties of birds of which nine were new to me and two of them remain unidentified to this day.

The biggest surprise for me was the presence of a stork wheeling high in the air with vultures. It had black wings with white triangular patches at the 'shoulders', a white body, whitish tail, long trailing legs and a large dark neck. I made a sketch and comparing this later with Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE I realised that it was a Black Stork, Ciconia nigra, migrating over the Himalayas.

The kite was seldom seen. The Hawk Eagle, Spizactus species, was seen on three occasions each time chivvied by Jungle Crows which were abundant even at this season. One or two Sceptre Eagles, Aquila nipalensis soared now and then with vultures, but on November 10, just before lunch, I saw 22 of them within a period of 20 minutes flying from North-east in a westerly direction. They were certainly migrating.

Five species of vultures were present, Pondicherry, Torgos calvus, Himalayan Griffin, Gyps himalayensis, Whitebacked, Gyps bengalensis Egyptian, Neophron percnopterus, and the Bearded, Gypaetus barbatus. The Himalayan Griffin and the Egyptian vultures were more commonly seen. The only falcon present was the Kestrel, Falco tinnunculus, seen on a few occasions. Once two of them came into the hotel compound, one sat on the top of a deodar tree and called, spreading its wings and tail now and then.

I heard the Rufous Turtle Dove, Streptopelia orientalis, once but did not see it. A single Spotted Dove, Streptopelia chinensis, was seen on two occasions at Bhatrojkhan (5200 ft.) eighteen miles from Ranikhet.

A flock of Slatyheaded Parakeets, Psittacula himalayana, were seen and heard at Almora.

At Bhatrojkhan I saw a solitary swift uniformly dark below which I was unable to identify, Glaucidium cuculoides, the West Himalayan Barred Owllet was seen both at morning and sundown and allowed a close approach. I watched one sitting on a stump only 20 ft. away. It had rather short wings which did not reach even halfway down the barred tail though the illustration in Salim Ali's HILL BIRDS shows the wings reaching beyond the tail. The musical double note of the Spotted Scops Owl, Otus spilocerphalus was heard on most nights.

The Great Himalayan Barbet, Megalaima virens, is a resident bird. I saw one catching a beetle.

The Spotted Piculet, Picumnus innominatus, in spite of its diminuti

size made quite a noise while tapping at trees for insects. I only saw females. I have never seen a male though once I watched a female feeding its young at a nest hole, but the male did not appear as long as I watched.

Six species of woodpeckers were present of which the Rufousbellied Hypopicus hyperithrus was new to me. A pair was seen on October 27 and 9 days later, presumably the same pair was found in practically the same area. This woodpecker, though larger than the Brownfronted Woodpecker makes a very feeble noise while digging for insects under barks of trees, perhaps because of its comparatively slender bill. This one was a very silent bird. The West Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, Dendrocopos himalayensis; the Brownfronted Woodpecker, Dendrocopos auriceps; and the Scalybellied Green Woodpecker, Picus squamatus were numerous and extremely noisy. The Small Yellownaped Woodpecker, Picus chlorophus, and the Blacknaped Green Woodpecker, Picus canus, were seen once and twice respectively. The latter breeds in Ranikhet as I had seen it there in summer as well.

The Redrumped Swallows, Hirundo daurica, were wheeling about on most days and they called frequently.

Only the Rufousbacked Shrike, Lanius schach, was seen on two visits to Bhatrojkhan.

The drongo was conspicuous by its absence and a single Gray Drongo, Dicrurus leucophaeus, once flew past our hotel. Common mynas were present in small pockets.

The Blackthroated Jay, Garrulus lanceolatus, was one of the commonest and boldest birds at this season. Every morning it came to feed on acorns of the Himalayan Oak trees in the compound of West View Hotel. It was wonderful to watch them patiently pick at the acorn, peel the thick outer skin and feed on the meat. Once a jay dropped a large black spider 4 feet away from me. It flew down, picked up the spider, flew back to the tree, pulled out the long black legs and ate them, then swallowed the body. Often two or three of them hopped on the ground quite close to me in search of fallen acorns. Several times I watched them drink water (dew ?) from the open rain pipes along the roof of the hotel.

The Redbilled Blue Magpies, Kitta erythrorhyncha, were equally bold and numerous. They came to manure heaps under these oak trees, and were seen to carry acorns in their bills and once I watched several of them feeding noisily on a carcase of a small animal.

The Indian Tree Pie was only seen at Almora. The Shortbilled Minivet, Pericrocotus brevirostris, was fairly common. On several occasions the male came to the oak trees in the hotel compound where sometimes one perched hardly eight feet away from me.

The Whitecheeked Bulbul, Pycnonotus leucogenys, which is a very bold and friendly bird in Kashmir in summer was only seen on flowering wild cherry trees and the fruitladen bushes. The Redvented Bulbul was present at Bhatrojkhan (5200 ft.) and the Black Bulbul Hypsipotes madagascariensis, was seen occasionally.

One evening a Rustychecked Scimitar Babbler, Pomatorhinus erythro-  
genys, was calling from a tree top. At Naini Tal in June I had watched these birds fly up to roost in trees from where they called in the early mornings.

THREE WEEKS OF BIRDWATCHING IN RANIKHET  
IN AUTUMN

BY

Usha Ganguli

Ranikhet with a height of a little over 6000 ft. is a very well-wooded hill station comprising mostly Himalayan Oak, Pine, Horse Chestnut, a few Deodar, Eucalyptus and wild Cherry Trees. The eucalyptus and the wild cherry trees came into flower while I was there in Oct.-November, and the wild rose and some viburnum and other bushes were laden with ripe fruit and berries, and thus attracted a large variety of birds. I saw nearly sixty varieties of birds of which nine were new to me and two of them remain unidentified to this day.

The biggest surprise for me was the presence of a stork wheeling high in the air with vultures. It had black wings with white triangular patches at the 'shoulders', a white body, whitish tail, long trailing legs and a large dark neck. I made a sketch and comparing this later with Peterson's FIELD GUIDE TO THE BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE I realised that it was a Black Stork, Ciconia nigra, migrating over the Himalayas.

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The Streaked Laughing Thrush, Garrulus striatus, and the Himalayan Whistling Thrush were as much in evidence as in the summer.

The beautiful Blackheaded Sibia, Motacophasia capistrata, was seen to drink honey from the wild cherry trees. They had a peculiar whistling call at this time.

I was lucky to see three new flycatchers though I could not identify one of them. The Orangeforgetted Flycatcher, Muscicapa strophliata, and the Yellowbellied Flycatcher, Rhipidura hypoxantha, were only seen in the second week of November together with the Orangeflanked Bush Robin. The unknown flycatcher was a little smaller than the Orangeforgetted flycatcher, uniformly sooty on head, upperparts, wings, tail and breast, the rest of the underparts were white, and a white band ran through the wings. The sides of the face, chin, throat and bend of wing were black. Its colouring was the same as that of the male Magpie Robin, only the flycatcher was sooty where the robin was black except in the face, chin, and throat. It had a very straight stance and it was a very active little flycatcher flying fairly high up into the air and hovering often. There were two of them.

There were at least two species of Phylloscopus. I was certain about Phylloscopus proregulus, Pallas's Leaf Warbler, with a bright yellow rump which I saw at Bhatrojkhan. The other Phylloscopus was extremely numerous. In size it was about the Grey-headed Flycatcher Warbler, olive above; chin throat, breast pale grey, belly and vent yellow. A prominent yellowish supercilium, a whitish ring round the eyes, grey cheeks, double wing bar but only one of them prominent. It was very active, and hovered frequently showing a pale yellowish green rump. The Greyheaded Flycatcher Warbler, Seicercus xanthoschistos was also present in small numbers.

The Orangeflanked Bush Robin of which I had only seen the male in Gulmarg in June was seen in shady areas near small bushes and shrubs. The female was feeding on the black viburnum berries. A solitary male Dark Grey Bushchat sat on a wire at Almera. Three Greywinged Blackbirds, Turdus boulboul, two male and one female were feeding busily on berries at Chaubatia about 4 miles from Ranikhet.

At Bhatrojkhan I saw my first accentor, the Rufousbreasted Accentor on November 16. A group were feeding on a harvested terraced field, and at my approach took shelter immediately in the lay bushes bordering the field, but they were not very shy and appeared again when they thought they were not being watched. On my previous visit to Ranikhet in June, the only tit present was the Gray Tit, but in autumn only single birds were seen occasionally. Surprisingly, the Redheaded Tit, Aegithalos concinnus, the Greenbacked Tit, Parus monticolus, and the Yellowchecked Tit, Parus xanthogenys, were present in some numbers. I was very lucky to see the Yellowbrowed Tit, Parus modestus. This is a small greenish bird with a whitish ring round its eyes and Leaf Warbler-like habits from which it can be distinguished by the short tit-like bill. The yellow brow was not visible and I believe becomes prominent when the bird displays or is alarmed. Nothing much is known about its habits or nidification. Single birds were noted with other tits but once two birds were in the same tree. The call was a loud chee. One was seen chasing a Leaf Warbler. The Chestnut or Cinammonbellied Nuthatches, Sitta castanea, were resident and numerous though towards the end of our stay there were fewer birds. The males were quite pugnacious chasing one another. Once a male threatened another with its mouth wide open and the tail half fanned out. The Himalayan Tree Creeper was also abundantly seen. On our way to Kausani, 54 miles from Ranikhet, I twice saw a wall creeper, Tichodroma noraria, fly across the road.

The highlight of my birdwatching at Ranikhet was the sight of Aethopyga nipalensis, Blyth's Yellowbacked Sunbird. It had brilliant metallic green head and long pointed tail; the back was dark olive grey with a bright yellow rump. A thin maroon band below the nape was only visible in bright sunlight. The underside was golden orange paling to yellow on the vent. The call was a weench which is easy to remember. The male had a weak little song. Nothing is known about the status and nidification of this sunbird.

The White-eye, like many other birds came quite often to the wild cherry flowers. The Cinammon Tree Sparrows were ubiquitous. Lonehura punctulata or Spotted Munia were seen at Bhatrojkhan. The flock consisted of young birds with one or two adults. A flock of Himalayan Green Finch was seen only on October 25 at Ranikhet, but small flocks were seen at Bhatrojkhan three weeks later.

The Common Rose Finch, Carpodacus erythrinus, were present in small numbers at Bhatrojkhan on November 16.

A solitary male Pinkbrowed Rose Finch came only once to a wild cherry tree. The Meadow Bunting was fairly common at Bhatrojkhan on November 16.

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## THE HILL MYNA or GRACKLE

By

Brian Bertram

Mr. Brian Bertram is at present doing a year's field work in India, studying the social behaviour of the Indian Hill Myna. This work is being done as part of a Ph.D. thesis at the Sub-Department of Animal Behaviour in Cambridge, England, and is being carried out under the guidance of Dr. Salim Ali and under the sponsorship of the Bombay Natural History Society. He describes here the context in which this study is being done; we hope at a later date to give a report of his findings.  
-- Ed.]

The Hill Myna or Grackle (Gracula religiosa) is a forest bird distributed patchily over India and SE. Asia, but it is widely known and kept as a cage bird in many countries of the world. This is on account not of its appearance, which somewhat ugly, nor of its habits, which are messy, but is due to its extraordinary ability to imitate a wide variety of sounds, reproducing them with amazing accuracy. The noises imitated may be of animate origin, such as birds singing, dogs barking, or human speech, sneezing, coughing, or whistling, etc.; or they may be of inanimate origin such as the squeaking of chairs or the ringing of bells. The Hill Myna's ability to imitate sounds is rivalled only by some of the parrots. But there is no good evidence that either Hill Mynas or Parrots ever use this remarkable imitative ability in the wild state; my purpose is to discover whether or not wild Hill Mynas display these great powers of imitation. To predict that the answer to this question is almost certainly 'Yes' is not to explain away the problem but to lead on four further questions of "What do they imitate?, When do they learn their repertoire?, Why do they imitate?, and How do they imitate?". I will briefly discuss each of these four questions.

## 1. What do they imitate?

Birds vary considerably in the way in which they acquire their species-specific songs, as has been shown particularly by Professor Thorpe. Doves' songs are apparently entirely innate; that is to say that a male dove will produce the song characteristic of its species regardless of the way in which it is reared; a young dove does not need to hear an adult male of its own species in order to develop its own song. Dove song is thus fixed genetically, as if for example the plumage pattern.

Thorpe's experiments isolating young Chaffinches have shown that these have both an innate and a learnt component of their song. If young Chaffinches are prevented from hearing an adult male Chaffinch singing, then the song of these young birds is extremely simple; this simple inborn song they normally elaborate by hearing adult birds singing the proper Chaffinch song.

In the Hill Myna, the song appears to be almost entirely learnt -- at least, Hill Mynas in captivity seem to show virtually no common pattern in the sounds they make. If these sounds are learnt it is probably by imitation, and it seems likely that in the wild state young Hill Mynas acquire their repertoire of sounds by imitating the noises made by adult Hill Mynas. So to this extent wild Hill Mynas probably do use their powers of imitation; all this remains to be proven. The question of whether and how much Hill Mynas imitate the notes of other species in the wild state is still to be determined.

## 2. When do they learn their repertoire?

The Chaffinches referred to above are only able to learn their song during the first 14 months of their life; if for any reason they have not acquired the full characteristic song by this age, then they will never acquire it. There is thus a sensitive period of learning during early life, and the presence of this sensitive period suggests that song learning in these birds is an aspect of the wider subject of 'imprinting', studied intensively in young birds of precocial species. Hill Mynas appear to learn to imitate much better when young than when adult, and Dr. Salim Ali has suggested that the different age of capture is responsible for the widespread belief in the superiority of the northern over the southern race of the Hill Myna as a talking bird. This too awaits investigation.

## 3. Why do they imitate?

If Hill Mynas are found to imitate other species of birds in the wild state, why do they do so? This is an extremely difficult question to answer, particularly as it is still a hypothetical one. What is the evolutionary advantage in imitating the songs of other species of birds?; and are these other species deceived?; and other birds of the same species deceived?; or is this imitation perhaps just play, or perhaps just a side effect of a general ability to learn?; or what? I hope to be able at the end of my work to suggest answers to some of these questions.

## 4. How do they imitate?

The vocal organs of birds are very little known; it may be that much of the range of the Hill Myna's imitative ability is due to possible possession of particularly elaborate vocal organs; they have not been sufficiently studied as yet. But this is not the whole story, as is shown by the fact that Chimpanzees, which have

vocal organs almost identical to those of Man, are apparently quite incapable of vocal imitation: differences in brain structure are believed to account for this. But the brains of birds are not yet sufficiently understood; we cannot yet tell whether there are common structural features present in those bird species capable of vocal imitation and absent in other species.

There are enough problems in this whole study for at least a lifetime's work.

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## BEHAVIOUR OF A CAPTIVE GREAT HORNBILL

By

K.K. Neelakantan

On 16.1.1966 I paid a visit to the local zoo hoping to spend a couple of hours watching 'wild' birds, particularly some unfamiliar migrants which I expected to find in the bushes and trees which give the Zoo its special charm. But, though I did find a Blacknaped Oriole, I found myself spending more time observing the antics of the lone male Great Hornbill that was acquired by the Zoo some time last year.

The bird was in a cage some 8 ft. x 10 ft. and had been provided with a rusty iron bar to perch upon. The floor was covered with coarse sand mixed with some gravel. I found the bird repeatedly jumping down from the perch to the sandy floor two feet below it, keeping its wings open and laid flat on the ground, running its open bill through the sand. It took in a mouthful of sand, raised its head and let almost all the sand dribble away. Then, raising its body, it took hold of one of the flight-feathers of a wing and swiftly combed it with the bill. Then it leaped back to the perch, spent a few seconds there and again jumped to the floor to run through the whole routine. I watched the bird for more than ten minutes, and during this period it must have repeated the performance at least ten times. Some times the bird scooped up the sand, let it fall and 'wiped' its wing feathers with the bill three or four times before returning to the perch. On a few occasions it kept the wing closed while pretending to eat the sand. Once a large stone, about the size of a lemon, got between the mandibles and the bird at once raised its head, opened the bill wider and let the stone fall off.

I wonder whether the bird was indulging in a form of 'anting', for its behaviour suggested the sort of nervous excitement associated with this phenomenon. If it was a form of 'anting', it must be a habit acquired by the bird in captivity as it is not at all likely that a wild Great Hornbill will come down to the ground for such a purpose. It would be interesting to know whether William, the Great Hornbill who lived in the Bombay Natural History Society's office for nearly 30 years ever showed a tendency to 'ant'.

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## BIRDLIFE AND THE DROUGHT IN MYSORE STATE

By

G.V.R. Friend

I thought the drought we are going through would bring some unusual movements of birds and the following may interest you. To begin with normally the Chikmagalur tank which when full at this time of year is about 60 to 70 acres in extent, this year for the last two months has been about 5 acres in extent with water only a few inches deep. Usually it is full of duck but this season only a few spotbill, pintail, and garganey teal have been seen, and on one occasion seven mukhta were seen. The main new visitors have been the Black-winged Stilt (Himantopus himantopus) since September 29 and are still there although water covers only an acre now, for most of the time there have been from 50-100 of them so the feeding must have suited them. Another bird to turn up in great numbers was the Little Ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius), at times there must have been up to 50 feeding on the damp mudflats, when alarmed they seem to join up into a fair sized flock and have a gross turn of speed and turn or land at great speed also.

Other unusual visitors have been 7 Black Ibis but they stayed only two days. Spoonbills have come occasionally usually 7 or 8 but once 22 were seen. On December 23 and 24 six Redshanks were seen and I wish they had stopped longer; they seem to stay very close together when feeding, and their movements are very quick.

Two Ruddy Sheldrake or Brahminy Duck were seen on November 11th and were seen off and on till December 3. One I am sorry to say was shot by lads who were really after the Stilts!! But they were very foolish birds and paddled about very near the road passing over the bund; three times I and a friend put them up so that they went a little further away. They are decidedly uncommon in these parts, I found no one who had seen them before and Phythian-Adams in his notes on birds shot around Mysore City notes only one in all the years he was there (see J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc., 1940).

Also on this tank were the Little Stint, Sandpiper, but I can never differentiate one from the other, but they were not in any very great numbers.

In normal years the stork tribe usually make an appearance in small numbers particularly the Openbilled Stork but they have not been seen this year, no doubt conditions are not favourable for their type of food?

On account of the failure of the S.W. and N.E. monsoons that weather conditions set in early in November, grass was brown and the temperature much higher than normal for the time of year. This no doubt made a difference to the insect world so that the number of wagtails, rollers, bee-eaters, decreased; then after some rain towards the end of November and early December they returned for a short period but now things are drying up again they have decreased. I think they probably only move on into the Malnad proper where in the forests the insect life can survive better than in the 'Maidan' country?

Under normal climatic conditions we should not get rain till March-April, thunder showers that will give green grass once again for the cattle and may give enough water to cover the beds of the tanks but before they can fill up properly will not be before the end of

June and more likely July? Pity the poor Ryot who deserves all the sympathy the townsfolk can give him; it is not his fault there is a shortage of food!

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#### Review

BIRDS OF HEATH AND MARSHLAND, and BIRDS OF FIELD AND FOREST. Illustrations by S. Demartini. Text by O. Stepanek. Trans. by A. Dencsova. London 1965. Spring Books.

We are by now accustomed to see magnificently produced and illustrated bird books which seem to show that the painting and printing of bird pictures has reached the ultimate perfection. The two volumes under review have been printed in Czechoslovakia presumably because of printing costs. The quality of the paper, the reproduction of the coloured paintings, and the typography are all superb.

Both the books are largish, but not too big to stand upright in a bookcase. Each volume is more than an inch thick, although there are not more than about 130 pages. There is a full-page illustration of one species on every page, facing a page of text which describes the bird. The paintings are clear and accurate, placed on the flat white ground of the page, and without any distracting "environment". Mr. Demartini's style of painting birds gives them a very realistic soft-feathered texture, so that one can almost feel the bird's warm body.

The first volume, BIRDS OF FIELD AND FOREST describes most of the commoner passerines of Europe while the second describes what the author calls "game birds" in which he includes all the species which could possibly be included under that title. The short descriptions which accompany each painting are businesslike but the author's inner feelings are revealed in the long introduction to each volume. The introduction is heavily slanted for the author is shown to be a passionate conservationist anxious to protect birds from the gun as well as from thoughtless people who destroy habitats and nesting sites. He cannot have too much of this kind of publicity in India, and if the books were not worth possessing for any other reason, they would be worth having for the genuine love and affection which the author so obviously bears for his subjects.

(L.F.)

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#### MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE BIRDWATCHERS' FIELD CLUB OF INDIA

The Annual General Meeting of the Birdwatchers' Field Club of India was held at the residence of Mr. Zafar Futehally, Juhu Lane, Andheri, at 5.00 p.m. on 15th January 1966.

The following were present:

|                          |                       |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Dr. Salim Ali            | Mr. B.A. Palkhivala   |
| Dr. A.K. Joshee          | Capt. H.P. Bhandarkar |
| Mrs. K. Sethi            | Miss Shama Futehally  |
| Mrs. B. Choksi           | Mrs. L. Futehally     |
| Mr. V. Udaya Shankar Rao | Mrs. M.F. Bhandarkar  |
| Mr. H. Sethna            | Mr. O. Nilsson        |
| Mr. R.M. Sett            | Mrs. Sylvia Nilsson   |
| Mr. J.M. Sett            | Mr. Ved Sethi         |
| Mr. S.V. Nilakanta       | Mr. Zafar Futehally   |
|                          | Mrs. S. S. Sanyal     |

## PROCEEDINGS

1. Dr. Salim Ali was elected Chairman of the meeting.
2. The minutes of the last Annual General Meeting, circulated with Newsletter of January 1965, were read and confirmed.
3. The Hon. Secretary gave a general report about the work of the Club during 1965. He said that the number of contributors to the Newsletter was increasing, and read out the following list of the persons, who had sent in articles, reviews, or letters for publication.

|                            |                         |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Rev. A. Navarro, S.J.      | Mr. D.A. Holmes         |
| Mr. Joseph George          | Mr. Uday Shankar Rao    |
| Dr. Amin Tyabji            | Master V. Kavi          |
| Mr. S.V. Nilakanta         | Mr. J.S. Varma          |
| Dr. H.L. Gusa              | Dr. Miss A. Gusi        |
| Mr. S.D. Jayakar           | Mr. S.K. Rao            |
| Mr. R.A.S. Malviash        | Mrs. Jamil Ara          |
| Miss Phyllis Barclay Smith | Miss Miriam Brown       |
| Mr. V.M. Kelkar            | Mr. Missin Baikial      |
| Mr. J.C. Wright            | Mrs. Usha Ganguli       |
| Mr. J.H. McKilvie          | Mr. S.S. Saha           |
| Mrs. Ladoo Futchally       | Mr. J.D.J. Erskine-Crum |
| Major A. David             | Mr. L.A. Hill           |
| Prof. K.K. Neelakantan     | Capt. J.C. Ichonai      |
| Mr. R.W. Chatterjee        | Mr. Mandon Nilakanta    |
| Mr. A. Manu Nair           | Mr. T.J. Roberts        |
| Mr. E.K. Mahavan           | Mrs. Maurcen Thom       |
| Mr. Zafar Futchally        | Dr. R. Spurlay          |
| Mr. T.V. Jose              | Mrs. J.D. Thom          |
| Dr. R.L. Fleming           | Mr. E.H. Ramble         |
| Mr. Ramashwar Pal Singh    | R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji  |
| Mrs. Leela Nilakanta       | Mr. Pratap Singh        |
| K.S. Lavkumar              | Mr. P.M. Soman          |

Vital statistics: 46 contributors; foreigners: 16; more than one contribution: 16

It was noted that 16 of them had sent in more than one contribution, indicating their serious interest in the Newsletter. Out of the 46 contributors, 16 were Englishmen and 16 were Indians, the continued to be the keenest subscribers.

The Honorary Secretary requested members to send in more review and extracts of articles from other natural history journals. It was necessary to publish more facts about the ornithological world being carried out in the various parts of the world, and this would only be possible if members sent in information of this type.

Regarding the expenditure from the break up of accounts submitted it was noted that the total expense for the year was Rs 2,183. The number of copies sent out monthly varied to a certain extent and in December 1965, 375 copies were sent. Since there were only about 200 members who had subscribed, there was a deficit of about Rs 1000/- which the Hon. Secretary agreed to meet.

It was, however, decided that during the current year, the complimentary list would be cut down, so that there was a small deficit, and every attempt would be made to collect subscriptions from everyone receiving the Newsletter.

The total amount in the current account opened for the Newsletter was Rs496.79 on 14.1.1966.



It was decided that no separate office bearers of the Club were necessary, and the members of the Editorial Board of the Newsletter could act as Regional Secretaries for their respective areas. Mrs. L. Nilakanta and Mr. Zafar Futchally were respectively elected as Hon. Treasurer and Hon. Secretary of the Club. Dr. Salim Ali was elected as Chairman.

The following were elected as members of the Editorial Board of the Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Dr. Salim Ali, D.Sc., F.N.I.<br>33 Pali Hill, Bombay 50                   | 2. K.S. Lavkumar<br>Rajkumar College, Rajkot                                       |
| 3. Capt. M.S. Tyabji<br>Gujarat Refinery Project Camp<br>Baroda              | 4. Mrs. Usha Ganguli<br>10 Cavalry Lines<br>Delhi 7                                |
| 5. Mrs. Jamal Ara<br>North Office Para, Doranda<br>Hinoo P.O., Ranchi, Bihar | 6. Dr. Bishanoy Biswas<br>Indian Museum,<br>Zoological Survey of India<br>Calcutta |
| 7. Prof. K.K. Neelakantan<br>University College<br>Trivandrum, Kerala        | 8. Mr. R.A.S. Molluish<br>Oxford University Press<br>Mount Road, Madras            |
| 9. Capt. M.P. Bhandarkar<br>Santacruz, Bombay                                | 10. Mr. Zafar Futchally<br>Editor<br>Juhu Lane, Andheri<br>Bombay 58               |

The meeting terminated with a vote of thanks to the Chair.

#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Mushroom and the Bulbul

Some time back I reported in the Newsletter that bulbuls at Tambaram eat the petals of certain flowers. This time I have something more interesting to report. During the third week of November, I saw a Whitebrowed Bulbul flying from the ground with and orange coloured substance in its beak. On closer examination I found a group of mushrooms at the precise spot from which the bird had flown away. A few bits were missing from these mushrooms and it is most likely that the bulbul was interrupted while eating the mushrooms. The mushroom is golden yellow or orangish in colour and has a funnel-shaped cap. It belongs to the genus Cancharellus all the species of which are said to be 'edible'. Swanton in his FUNGI AND HOW TO KNOW THEM lists several insects, slugs, snails and several mammals as feeding on mushrooms. Birds however are not included in the list. On the other hand, he points out that birds which eat these insects and snails, indirectly assist in the distribution of the spores of the mushrooms, thereby introducing the Continental species of mushrooms into Britain.

Gift Sirononey  
Madras Christian College  
Tambaram, Madras 59

\* \* \* \* \*

Zafar Futchally  
Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane  
Andheri, Bombay 58

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Drought conditions and waterbirds in the Mysore State. By Rhalid Ghani (p. 9)

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THE BIRDS OF DARRANGA (BHUTAN)

By

Zafar Futehally

The King of Bhutan has asked Dr. Salim Ali to undertake a survey of the birds of his country and to write a book about them on the same general lines as his 'Birds of Sikkim'. The survey is now in progress and I had the good luck of being with the survey party from the 30th January to the 10th February. It was with reluctance that I came away to continue the process of earning my living.

Bhutan is an independent state in the Eastern Himalayas bordered by Sikkim, the Chamb Valley, and the district Darjeeling on the West and Nepal on the East. To the North lies Tibet, and to the South the Goalpara, Kamrup, and Jalpaiguri districts of Assam. It is roughly 26 to 28 degrees North and 88 to 91 degrees East. The country consists of extremely steep mountain ranges running mainly East to West and there are at present three roads running North to South through the country. All these roads are being constructed by Dantak, the Project of the Border Roads Organisation of the Government of India, which

which is concerned with road making in this area. At the moment the Bird Survey work is being carried out in the Eastern part of Bhutan, along the road going from Darranga to Tashigong. Darranga is at a height of 2200 M from sea level and Tashigong about 185 K.M. away, is at a height of 1000 M and in between the road crosses areas as high as 2730 M.

Before joining the party in Bhutan I spent a couple of days with Mr. E.P. Gee, in Shillong. As is well known, he is now a distinguished honorary worker in the cause of nature preservation in this country and his home 'Evergreen Cottage' has become a place of pilgrimage for like-minded people from all parts of the world. His orchid collection is famous, and he has acquired an intimate knowledge of the requirement of each species of plant, so that he can make them bloom to their maximum glory. Orchids are apparently very choosy about their host plants---which is strange considering that they are merely epiphytic. *Bauhinia variegata* and *Largestroemia* are satisfactory hosts. The orchids are tied to the tree in a position as similar as possible to the one in which they were before being plucked from the forest. Nature, after all, is the best guide and the way sunlight strikes the flower is all important. Apart from orchids, 'Evergreen Cottage' has lovely trees, all carefully positioned to get the best possible effect. Upper Shillong is about 2500 M high and the main trees here are Pines (*pinus insularis*). There are also some deodhars and cypruses.

In spite of the thickly wooded hills, bird life is conspicuous by its absence. During the two days I was there I saw only the Scarlet Minivet, Southern Yellow Cheeked Tite (black crests with black line down their throats) Blackheaded titias, White eyes, Ashy drongos, crows, (with very deep voices) Himalayan Whistling Thrushes and Redvented Bulbuls. Apparently there is a great deal of netting and killing going on here. On my way up by taxi from Gauhati I saw a man with a catapult carrying a freshly killed Bronze-winged Dove, and talks with the locals indicated that they considered birds primarily as an article of food.

On 30th January, I arrived at Rangiya Rly. station to meet the survey party. Rangiya is the nearest railway station to Bhutan, and from there onwards all the movement was by jeep. Between Rangiya and Darranga a distance of nearly thirty miles, there were several Bombax and *Erythrina* trees, which were in bloom, and they were inhabited by many flower and nectar eating birds. Apparently in these parts birds are not molested and killed, which was a pleasant change from the situation in the Khasi hills (Shillong) less than a hundred miles away. Every few hundred yards in the wet fields by the side of the road there were solitary Lesser Adjutant Storks, suggesting that each bird had acquired a particular territory for itself. We also saw several Brown Shrikes (migrants) which appear to be the only species of shrike found here. The piercing and far-carrying call of a Crested Serpent Eagle from a telegraph pole was exciting and familiar although, as Salim Ali pointed out it was of a different race from the ones we see in Bombay.

The Bhutan Administration had made excellent bunkhouse for us and we were soon happily settled in the Guest House at Darranga. I shall always remember Darranga for the two striking Flame of the Forest trees in the compound of the Guest House, and the equally attractive birds which flocked to them.

Rosebreasted parakeets were constantly around these trees. The calls of these birds are much deeper and less shrill than those of the parakeets at home and have a certain duck-like quality about them 'KAN KAN KAN'. There were also quite a few Large Spider Hunters, small birds with an enormously big curved bill. They seemed to me to be a good diminutive replica of a curlew. The colour is also similar. They have a shrill chattering call and we came across them in many localities. They are extremely active and seem intent on getting all the nectar from the flowers before the others have had a drink. We shot a specimen at Deothang and when the dead bird was held by its legs, beak pointing down, quite a large quantity of colourless nectar trickled

down. I had a sip, and it was as sweet as sugar. Then there were the Goldfronted Chloropsis, which keep up an endless chatter and imitate to perfection other bird calls. They are also very aggressively disposed towards other birds. They do not believe in co-existence and insist on driving away other birds which come to the same branch or even to the same tree. There were Bluethroated Barbets (*Megalaima Asiatica*) with crimson red foreheads and the Large Green Barbets calling at all hours of the day. Grey Headed Mynas, Collared Bushchats Brown Shrikes, and Chestnut bellied Nuthatches, could all be watched without trouble.

The cook of the guest house, sensing our interest in viewing new varieties of birds, came upto us after dinner and said, we would probably consider him mad but every morning a two headed bird came to the Flame of the Forest tree and plucked the flowers alternately with both its beaks on either side of the body. Dr. Salim Ali offered him Rs.100/= in cash and world fame if the bird was shown to him next morning. The next morning alas his 'TAKDIR' was bad and the bird did not come.

A boulder strewn stream meanders around Darranga and we were excited by what we saw along the stream and in the adjoining forested tracks. Apart from the birds mentioned we saw Black Partridge (?), Bronze Drongo, Black Drongo, Hair-Crested Drongo, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo (the rackets are more elongated yet smaller than the ones on the Racket tails of Bombay), Shama, Iora, Whitecapped Redstart, Plumbeous Redstart, Blythe Rock Thrush, White Wagtail, Green Sandpiper, White throated Kingfisher, Magpie Robin, Whitebacked vulture, Redvented Bulbul, Red-whiskered Bulbul, Pond Heron, Tailor Bird, Barred Jungle Owlet (only heard its call *kao kuk, kao kuk, kao kuk* : ), Himalayan Pied Kingfisher, Red eared Rufous Woodpecker, Ashybacked Shrike, Spotted Forktail, Striated Munia, and Greyheaded Flycatcher.

I would particularly like to comment on two species of Fantail flycatchers, which were very common here and which we had the opportunity of seeing at close quarters, the Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher, and the White throated Fantail Flycatcher. True to their genus the birds kept returning to the same perch after working sallies after winged prey, so that they could be observed for long periods. The Whitethroated bird is very much like the Whitespotted one in Bombay, except that it is darker and has only one white line at its throat. Its call is not as sharp and neat as that of the other species and it seemed to be less spry than *albobularis*. Nevertheless it is a delightful bird, and its presence gave the forest a dainty quality. The other bird, equally agile, restless, and confiding, was the Yellowbellied species, which was one of the few birds I managed to photograph. Unfortunately, it is always on the outskirts of thick bush and scrub and the tiny bird is lost among the tangled background.

At Darranga, which is only at a height of 250 M above sea level, both the House Sparrow and the Tree Sparrow were present. Higher up at Deothong 1100 M (formerly known as Diwangiri) only the Tree Sparrow was present. The steady and definite change in the species of birds at different levels of the Himalayas is an exciting feature of bird-watching in these parts. One advantage of being with Salim Ali is that every bird can be identified accurately, and all relevant taxonomical and ecological facts about it are available to the enquirer. Without this information mere watching would be much less meaningful. Below the tall trees of the forests at Darranga the undergrowth mainly consists of a shrub called EUPHETORUM. This is rather Lantana like in appearance but it is actually a competitor of the Lantana. No Lantana grows in these parts. Unfortunately, unlike Lantana, Euphatorium produces no berries for birds, so that apart from providing cover it is not much use from the avian point of view. However, it is a very domineering sort of plant, and has extended its influence very effectively over the Eastern Himalayan region.

# BIRDS OF JUHU SWAMP

By

S.V. Nilakanta

Bombay City as we know it today was at one time many small islands separated by the sea which has a rise and fall of nearly sixteen feet during spring tides. Most of these islands have been joined together by the process of silting and also by dumping city refuse. In many places the flight for living space has been so great that this reclamation seems to have been done without paying due attention to natural drainage, with the result that in the rainy season, water collects in low-lying areas and can drain out only when the tide ebbs. These floods are not uncommon.

During such floods, Juhu can be recognized as a separate island lying to the east of Santa Cruz and Vile Parle. The main access to Juhu is by a causeway from Santa Cruz. There is a small swamp to the north of this causeway and a much larger one to the south. The low area north of the causeway ebbs and floods through a narrow culvert. The vegetation of this part is stunted. There are also several acres of dirty mud which harbours several small waders as well as the ever present Pond Herons. It is worth one's while to stand on this road somewhere near the Lido cinema and watch Little Egrets or one lone Reef Heron stalk mud skippers. There, at times, may be seen hundreds of these amphibians waiting to be caught. At other times there is too much water for waders and we may see cormorants or coots.

The swamp to the south of the road is thick with vegetation, and birds, if any, cannot be spotted. This part of the swamp drains into the fast flowing Danda creek, which effectively cuts off Juhu from Bandra.

Although the main causeway remains the bus route and the usual access to the southern extremity of Juhu, further land connection is provided by the Juhu aerodrome which is just a flat and not very broad field joining Vile Parle to Juhu. Till two years ago almost free access to this airfield was available, the field being used only for amateur flying. Recently, however, strong fences have been erected as security measures. The southern fence of the airfield is the northern boundary of the swamp, described in the previous paragraphs. On this boundary may be seen vast numbers of wagtails, Grey, Yellow, and White Wagtails can be compared at close range for identification signs. Ringed Plovers and Kentish Plovers can also be seen though the latter are very abundant on the sandy beach of Juhu sea shore. This boundary is difficult of access and not recommended for birdwatching.

The northern fence of the airfield is the southern boundary of yet another swamp which stretches from Vile Parle to Juhu in the east-west direction. Easy access is provided by a new road running along the northern boundary of the swamp as well as from lanes between newly constructed houses in Juhu.

This swamp has no vegetation, is a salt water marsh and its bottom is just oozy mud which dries and cakes on its fringes. On the caked mud may be seen White Wagtails, Little Indian Skylarks and difficult to identify pipits. There is a short belt of rather dry grass on which Blackbellied Finch Larks glean seeds. Further on are the fence posts of new constructions on which sit Rufousbacked Shrikes and an odd Blue Rock Thrush. But it is the actual water of the swamp which teems with birds and holds our attention.

The waders in the swamp water can be graded according to height or rather according to length of legs and thus they deploy themselves. The shortest feed in the shallow edges and the tallest stand farther away in deeper water. Since we are not able to judge distances very well, especially when looking through field glasses, the far away birds look small. Fortunately there are large numbers of Blackwinged Stilts and Pond Herons everywhere and comparison with these can give a reasonable indication of size. A

Little caution has to be exercised in judging the size of pond herons which can crouch into small brown bundles or stretch their long rubber necks straight upwards.

The smaller waders make up for their size by being present in larger numbers. Thus, the Little Stint becomes noticeable, especially as flocks of hundred or more birds take off for no apparent reason and fly, skimming over the water in unison. The whole flock disappears and reappears depending on whether they show their brown back or their white undersides as they bank and turn. After flying all over the place, they settle down sometimes in a different place and sometimes back in their original place and start feeding at once.

Numbers of Wood Sandpipers may be seen feeding in the foreground. The very similar but much larger Greenshank can be recognized at once by its size and by its relatively longer legs. We have to wait and see one of the Wood Sandpipers fly to notice the white rump and brownish tail. Occasionally, one of them flies and shows a dazzlingly white rump and whiter tail. This is a Green Sandpiper.

The somewhat unsociable Common Sandpiper may be seen feeding, quietly by itself, some distance away from other birds. If we wait and watch till the bird flies, it will enable us to identify it positively by its whitish wing bar and brown rump. This bird holds out its wings in a peculiarly stiff attitude and beats its wings in very short strokes. Once this is noticed, it cannot be forgotten.

Redshanks are easily identified by the colour of their legs. It is a good thing to position ourselves with the sun behind us so that the birds are properly illuminated and also to avoid too much glare from the water. Otherwise, it is not possible to see all the delicate shades of colour in all these essentially brown and white birds.

In the great distance we may see three or four Large Egrets. These are available throughout the year. On some days we may see a few Grey Herons. At that distance it becomes impossible to judge size but the slow and majestic wing beats distinguish it from a closer Reef Heron.

On one occasion, we have seen Whimbrels or were they Curlews? They were too far off to distinguish dark crown stripes, present in Whimbrels and absent in Curlews.

On more than one occasion we have seen the beautiful avocets. Once, when the tide had flooded the swamp, the avocets were swimming like ducks.

One day, while watching this panorama, there was a sudden commotion. All the birds with the exception of the largest rose up although no gun was discharged and there had been no sudden noise. I looked skywards for the reason while the birds flew helter skelter at top speed. The reason appeared in the shape of a Marsh Harrier (female) which came down in a swooping glide but went onwards without picking up anything.

There are usually numerous House Crows, which sometimes chase the smaller birds. In this season, when there are so many winter visitors, one just doesn't take much notice of Redwattled Lapwings and Kites and such.

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# SOME BIRDS COMMON TO INDIA AND NORTHERN EUROPE

By

Sven Nilsson

We have been living in Iran for four years and are now on our third year in India. Although ornithologists only in a very elementary way we have had great pleasure in studying to some extent the birdlife in these countries and compare with that of our homeland Sweden.

Some birds are obviously very well equipped for life in various environments which differ considerably as to climatic and other conditions. I am not so much thinking of migrant birds for which their normal cycles of life may take them from the tropics to the Arctic and back again every year. But of our common birds, e.g. the house sparrow (Passer domesticus) is found over most of Eurasia and seems to be equally able to survive a Scandinavian winter as an Indian summer.

One of the common crows in India, the house crow, Corvus splendens, appears to be very similar in its plumage to that of most of Eurasia, Corvus cornix. A layman would suggest the differences to be only that of races, but the books say something different. Corvus cornix is common from the River Elbe to the Jenisei and the common crow of Iran, but definitely a different specimen than Corvus splendens.

The black Indian crow (Corvus macrorhynchos) on the other hand, is in India taking the place of the raven (Corvus corax), not that of the black crow of Europe (Corvus corone). It also looks more like a raven.

But how has it really been established which of these populations are races and which are different specimens?

Very interesting is to see the beautiful great shrike (Lanius excubitor) in India, knowing that in Sweden it breeds only in the northern part. In winter it comes down to southern Sweden. It can then be seen sitting on fence poles during the short day at 00 P. looking for food.

Or the Little Grebe (Podiceps ruficollis), which can sometimes be seen staying as a rare guest through the winter in Stockholm, swimming in the narrow water kept free from ice by the strong currents at the outlet of Lake Maelaren.

This particular spot of open water in Stockholm is a haven for an enormous number of birds in severe winters as the present one. Otherwise shy birds become quite domesticated as they are fed by people. The great number of swans in particular make a spectacular feature in the centre of the metropolis. Of the birds common to India the coot (Fulica atra) is always found there.

Another interesting species is the Lesser Spotted Eagle, which can although rarely, be seen in Sweden and Iran, which are the northwestern and southeastern limits of one population, while there is another population of the same bird breeding in India. It is surprising that it is not to be found in between. Could dependence on forests be the explanation?

The kestrel (Falco tinnunculus) resident only in south India is a very common bird in Iran, in breeding season actually the bird of prey most easily seen in that country. In Sweden it has also been common until recently, but, alas the mercury treatment of seeds has now almost made it extinct. Its primary food, such as field mice eat of the poisoned seed and become an easy prey in turn transferring of the deadly poison to the kestrels.

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## A VALLEY IN THE ORISSA JUNGLE

By

S. K. Reeves

In the June 1965 issue of the Newsletter, in a note entitled "A Valley in the Orissa Jungle", I made some remarks regarding the distribution of the Large Greenbilled Malkoha (Rhopodytes tristis). I was prompted to do so by an article written by Mr. L.A. Hill, in the May issue, under the same heading.

I am at present reading a book entitled A BIRD PHOTOGRAPHER IN INDIA, written by that well-known photographer of Indian birds E.H.N. Lowther, and which was published in 1949 by the Oxford University Press (Indian branch).

It occurred to me that our readers and Mr. Hill in particular, might be interested to read what the author has to say (at p. 46) regarding the status of this bird in the Manbhum District of Bihar. At the time of writing, the author was stationed at Dhanbad and would appear to have done a good deal of his bird photography in the Dhanbad sub-division of the district. It will be observed that, in terms of avian distribution, Dhanbad is not so very far from Pimposh.

Mr. Lowther writes as follows:

"As long ago as 1862, Jerdon either stated that the large Himalayan green-billed malkoha occurs or breeds in Chota Nagpur and the northern Circars, or he thought it did -- I am not sure which, as my copy of 'Jerdon' was lent a few years ago to a friend who failed to return it. But no ornithologist since appears to have met with this species in these parts, judging by what 'Old Fauna', 'New Fauna', and 'Nidification' have to say in the matter. The first-named quotes Jerdon in support of the large green-billed malkoha's occurring in Chota Nagpur, but adds: 'This needs confirmation,' while in 'New Fauna' Stuart Baker observes 'possibly Chota Nagpur and Northern Circars (Jerdon)', a statement which is repeated in 'Nidification', the relevant volume of which was published in 1934. It would therefore appear that in spite of the passage of seventy-eight years Jerdon's remarks still awaited confirmation in 1940, when I first published my discovery. It is surprising that the species has not been noted from Chota Nagpur in recent years, as it is not only fairly common (for an unusual bird) in Manbhum, in the heavy mixed forest round the Topchanchi reservoir and the Dolkata nullah, but is found in the neighbouring district of Hazaribagh. It is, however, a particularly shy species and frequents forests the ornithologist seldom invades, which fact probably accounts for its having remained unnoticed so long. A hasty glimpse of the bird -- and this is all that is vouchsafed one as a rule -- gives the impression of a very large male koel -- it is about twenty-three inches in length, more than half of which is accounted for by the tail. At close quarters, however, the apple-green bill, with a tinge of red about the base, and the bare crimson orbital patch, as also the ashy-green colouring about the head, neck and chin, are noticeable. Sceptics may imagine I am mistaken in my identity and that what I saw was the small green-billed malkoha. Such is not the case. Although I have not come across the second-named malkoha, it is not possible to confuse the two species. The small malkoha is not only considerably smaller (about 15½ inches in length) but has the orbital patch cobalt-blue and the throat feathers forked, which is not the case with the larger bird.

In the Manbhum district the large green-billed malkoha nests during July and August in heavy jungle, amongst creepers, at a height of between fifteen and twenty feet from the ground. I have found eggs as early as 14 July and as late as 8 August."



## NOTES AND COMMENTS

The regional clubs of Rajkot and Roorkee, U.P., seem to be doing very well. It would be a good policy for other regional editors of the Newsletter to organize lecture meetings and outings from time to time.

A report received from Dr. Joseph George, Central Building Research Institute, Roorkee, is reproduced below:

"The membership of the Club during 1965 was twelve which we consider quite good for a small place like Roorkee. During the year ten field trips were organized and the average attendance at these trips was over 50 per cent. Birdwatchers from other parts of the country visiting Roorkee joined our trips on a few occasions adding greatly to our pleasure.

"Mr. Haridutt Vedalankar of Haridwar addressed the Club on "Kalidasa as a birdwatcher", and Mr. K.M. Vaid of Dehra Dun on "Spring in the Himalayas".

Club members have made a modest beginning in attracting birds to gardens by installing nestboxes."

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### Birdwatching at Periyar, Kerala

If you want to avoid a holiday at home, no better place to spend it than Periyar, and no better time than the winter months -- we have just spent Christmas there.

Facilities for birdwatching are legion but not organized. The Hotel could give no advice. Eventually the Range Officer lent me a guide -- to show me the jungle paths, not to show me birds! In the three days I saw some 30 varieties, a dozen new to me, got a vicious crick in the neck from gazing at tree tops, and enjoyed an almost deafening day long chorus of song and chatter. Unfortunately I neither saw, nor heard, so far as I am aware, a Malabar Whistling Thrush.

My scorecard shows:

|                               |                           |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Black Drongo                  | Rackettailed Drongo (F)   |
| Velvetfronted Nuthatch (F)    | Redwhiskered Bulbul       |
| Paradise Flycatcher           | Common Wood Shrike        |
| Orange Minivet (F)            | Golden Oriole             |
| Grackle (F)                   | Large Pied Wagtail        |
| Goldenbacked Woodpecker       | Rufous Woodpecker (F)     |
| Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (F) | Pied Kingfisher           |
| Whitebreasted Kingfisher      | Malabar Grey Hornbill (F) |
| Whitebacked Vulture           | Darter                    |
| Whitenecked Stork             | Egrets                    |
| Paddybirds                    | Jungle Myna (F)           |
| Kestrel                       | King Vulture (F)          |
| Green Pigeon (greyfronted ?)  | Large Green Barbet        |
| Small Green Barbet            | Coppersmith               |
| Roseringed Parakeet           | Bluewinged Parakeet (F)   |
| Greyheaded Myna (F)           | Crimsonthroated Barbet    |
| Grey Wagtail                  |                           |

The Greyheaded Mynais questionable, seen in a flock at tree top height in fading dusk.

The hornbill male birds had yellowy/red bills and a ruddy patch around the vent, the females absolutely grey all over.

(F) shows my first sighting.

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| Goldenbacked Woodpecker       | Rufous Woodpecker (F)     |
| Chestnut-headed Bee-eater (F) | Pied Kingfisher           |
| Whitebreasted Kingfisher      | Malabar Grey Hornbill (F) |
| Whitebacked Vulture           | Darter                    |
| Whitenecked Stork             | Egrets                    |
| Paddybirds                    | Jungle Myna (F)           |
| Kestrel                       | King Vulture (F)          |
| Green Pigeon (greyfronted ?)  | Large Green Barbet        |
| Small Green Barbet            | Coppersmith               |
| Roseringed Parakeet           | Bluewinged Parakeet (F)   |
| Greyheaded Myna (F)           | Crimsonthroated Barbet    |

Grey Wagtail

The Greyheaded Mynais questionable, seen in a flock at tree top height in fading dusk.

The hornbill male birds had yellowy/red bills and a ruddy patch around the vent, the females absolutely grey all over.

(F) shows my first sighting.

Drought conditions and waterbirds in the Mysore State

The failure of the rains throughout the Mysore State must have brought so many waterbirds on a big tank, which I usually visit 4-6 times a year between August and February. The place I visit is about 40-60 miles from Chikmagalur district, which consists of 4-6 fairly big tanks. I first visited these tanks in August 1965 and found most of the tanks were drying and on one tank where there was about 3-4 ft. deep water I saw 12 flamingos and about 200 spoonbills and a few spottedbilled pelicans.

I visited the same place on 29th December 1965. On a small tank I saw for the first time a pair of Ruddy Sheldrake (Brahminy Duck) (as Dr. Salim Ali mentions in his book these ducks are rare to the south of Mysore), and also saw six painted storks and some shovellers. The other tanks were completely dry except for the big tank where thousands of waterbirds of many species congregated, which is about 250-300 acres in area. The concentration of so many birds must be due to the failure of rains and the drying up of almost all the surrounding tanks where these birds would have been distributed. It was a fascinating sight to see so many birds on a single tank which includes about 200-300 Barheaded Geese, about 20 flamingos, about 200 spoonbills, spotbills, pintails, shovellers, garganey, whistling teal, cotton teal, thousands of coots, little cormorants, darter (snakebird), grey heron, little egret, blackwinged stilt, stone curlew (in a scrub field near a tank), little stint, little ring plover, white ibis 2, black ibis 6, purple moorhen, pond heron and redwattled lapwing.

Again on 10th January 1966, I visited the same tank and there were about 40-50 geese and many other waterbirds. When I went on the other side of the tank, I was very much surprised to see bird-trappers spreading thousands of snares made out of fishing line on the tank's bank, where hundreds of ducks and geese come for resting in the day and night. When I asked them what they were doing and how many birds they had snared, they said, that they have come just for fun like myself. After making friends they slowly started telling that they had snared 10 geese and many other unwary birds which step into the snares. It seems they are professional trappers and must have snared hundreds of these lovely birds which include flamingos, geese, pelicans and many ducks. They said that they also snare Black Buck in the harvesting season. I actually saw a little stint caught itself by the neck in one of the snares as they had not yet completed spreading the snares. Really it is a great pity and I felt very sorry that such beautiful and lovely birds are caught indiscriminately by the hundred in a season. I saw the feathers around the tank.

The beautiful tank, I suppose could be converted into a Wildfowl Sanctuary, as so many thousands of birds congregate in the season every year and if they are protected, I am sure many more species of birds will collect. It will be an excellent and an ideal place for ornithologists and lovers of avifauna.

Unless this indiscriminate snaring and poaching is not stopped, the future of these lovely and pretty birds and animals will be in great danger and very soon they will be wiped out.

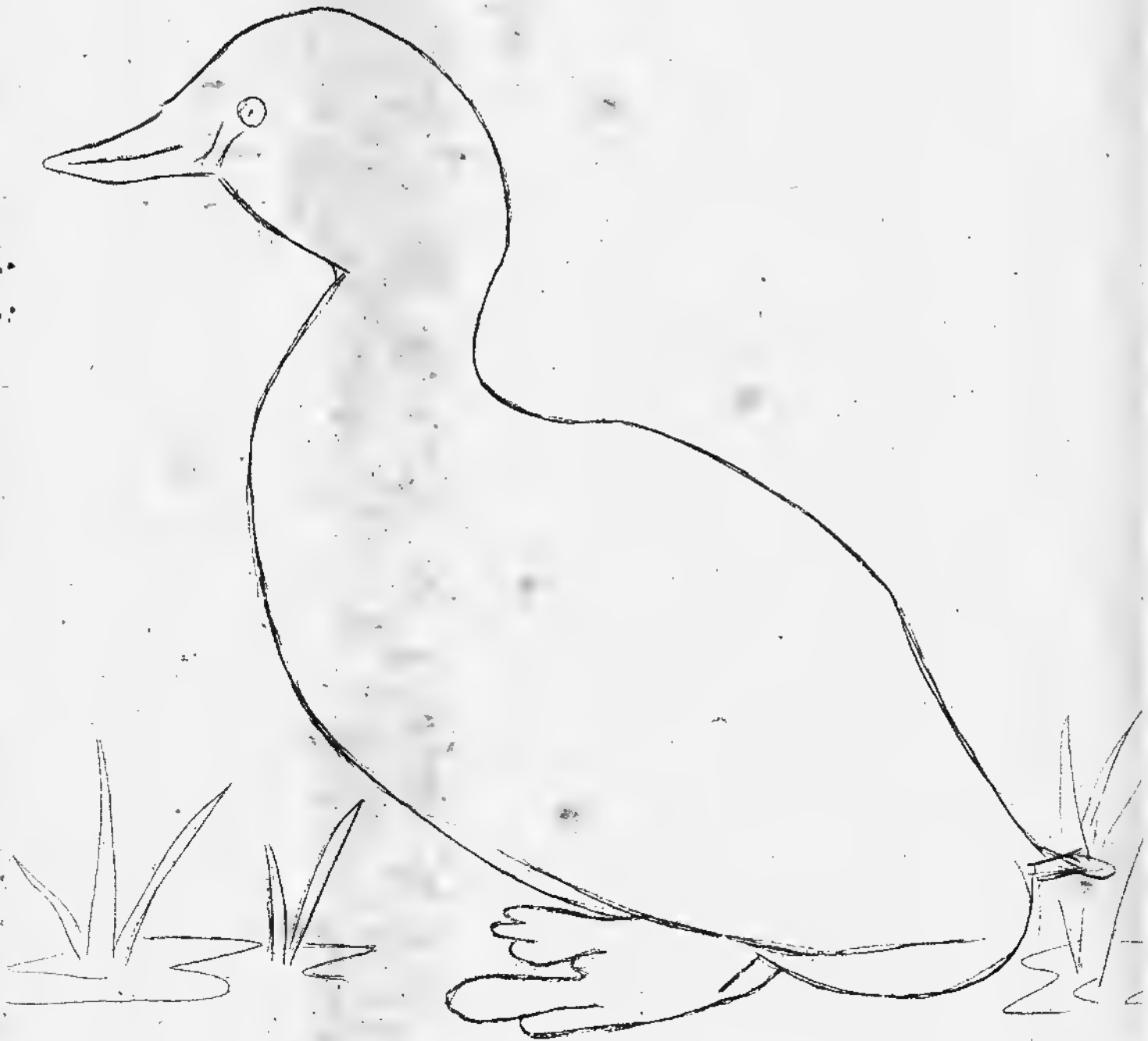
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Hosahalli Pet P.O., Chikmagalur, Mysore

Zafar Futehally

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# NEWSLETTER FOR BIRDWATCHERS.



APRIL 1966

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BIRD QUARRELS

By

S. V. Nilakanta

For the purpose of these observations two types of quarrels are omitted. They are

1. Quarrels between predators and prey. This being a serious matter of life and death, is outside the scope of mere quarrels and is also a completely one-sided affair.
2. Quarrels between birds of the same species. This study is one of a fascinating nature and involves social relationship, peck order, selection of mates, nesting sites and such. Observations here are of such a wide scope that they have to be omitted.

This leaves us with quarrels between different species and between the birds and other creatures. Strangely enough, these quarrels seem to be very few because birds are not given to logical reasoning or revengeful action.

That is why, perhaps, earlier this year, I saw a Rufousbacked Shrike and a Blue Rock Thrush sitting on adjoining fence posts on the same building plot. Every now and then one of them would fly down and grab a locust. It is well known that Rufousbacked Shrikes do not tolerate other shrikes poaching on their territory. They are even able to impale their victims on thorns and recover them later, much as a dog buries a bone and recovers it later. Some unwritten law assures the shrike that the impaled insect will not be stolen by another shrike. Yet the shrike was not bothered by the thrush.

This tolerant atmosphere does not prevail on top of the tall pipal tree adjoining my garden. Here, for a few weeks apair of Green Bee-eaters used to perch and cheer us with their call of tree ree ree. It was also a pleasure to watch them sail out on rainbow wings and catch invisible insects in mid air. Now a pair of Black Drongos which own this tree have returned. The Bee-eaters have vanished.

Although the drongos are not nesting on this tree, they chase away the crows that hang around on the neighbouring coconut trees. The drongos have built

an invisible fish bowl with their treetop as the centre. A crow flying into this region has to apply brakes suddenly and turn away almost as if it has flown blindly into a glass wall. Failure to do so definitely provokes an attack.

Drongos remain there and feed till it becomes quite dark. They have no quarrels with Palm Swifts which hawk for insects at higher levels and these in turn have no quarrels with the pipistrelles which become increasingly numerous as the night comes on.

On the shores of Vihar Lake, however, I have seen Black Drongos and several Bee-eaters hawking for insects in company. Probably in such cases the insects are so numerous that there is plenty for every bird and no need of quarreling. The drongos always returned to their own perches after each sally.

The temporary acquisition of a particular perch seems to give birds an almost human sense of ownership and possession. In front of the shipyard where I work, we have a few mooring buoys for tying up barges. In winter months, at almost any time we may see a few gulls sitting on the buoys. Both Blackheaded and Brownheaded Gulls sit on the buoys without quarreling but Herring Gulls never tolerate the smaller ones. Although they are seen in the company of smaller gulls they are not at all sociable here. That is, no two Herring Gulls are close to each other. One day a Herring Gull vacated the buoy on which it was sitting and alighted on the water about fifty yards away. The buoy was immediately occupied by a Brownheaded Gull. The Herring Gull got off the water with some effort and came back to chase away the Brownheaded Gull. Even though the Herring Gull went back to the water, it would not allow any smaller gull to sit on the buoy.

The hedges and drumstick trees at my place harbour a large number of insects. These are thoroughly sought for by Ashy Wren Warblers, Tailor Birds and in winter by a Blyth's Reed Warbler. Probably the same insects are eaten by all the three species which belong to the same subfamily. The Ashy Wren Warbler often feeds on the ground and seldom ascends to the treetops at a height of thirty feet or so. The Tailor Bird seldom alights on the ground and although at times ascends to the coconut trees at fifty feet, most often feeds at lower levels. The Reed Warbler never descends to the ground and feeds at higher level, especially on its first arrival in autumn. Although they constantly talk to birds of their own species, they take no notice of other birds. (The Reed Warbler constantly makes a tchip, tchip noise although there is no other Reed Warbler to hear it.) They are all on good terms with the Palm Squirrels which give loud warning when a cat comes prowling along.

Suddenly, once a day there is an invasion by a flock of Purple Sunbirds. They come in a noisy group and are mainly interested in the drumstick trees. They hang in most fantastic positions from the most precarious leaf tips and gather tiny insects. They also search all the flowers for nectar and insects. They are the only birds that can hang in mid air and pick off their food.

The Tailor Birds resent this invasion. I have seen rude fist-cuffs between a Tailor Bird and a Sunbird where the more agile sunbird definitely won on points. Often when the sunbirds are about, the Tailor birds sulk in the hedges.

I have seen a sunbird pick off a spider from a web in mid air without spoiling the web. This is something a Tailor Bird cannot do. Is it possible for a Tailor Bird to have the human feelings (failings would be more appropriate) of envy and jealousy?

Meanwhile, Ashy Wren Warblers and the Blyth's Reed Warbler make the best of the insects disturbed by the sunbird invasion.

Tailor Birds caught by me have usually pecked me. Here is another quarrel between two creatures more removed in size than a whale and I. Late one afternoon, I caught a sunbird, and for want of anything better to do, gave it a half teaspoon of tea, rich in sugar, remaining in my cold teacup in the

Whatever be the reasons for this paucity of marauders among the feathery tribes, it is possibly an indication of a poor bird population. We did see a few of them on several occasions like the Kestrel, Shikra, and the Tawny Eagle; and on two different occasions we spotted a pair of eagles soaring high into the heavens so that it was not possible to identify them with any degree of certainty. But from their shape and pattern of coloration we presumed that they were one of the two varieties of Fishing Eagles to be found in this region.

Hovering in the sky we noticed the presence of the Nilgiri House Swallow, the Whiterumped Swallow, and the Dusky Crag Martin. It was only late in the evening that we saw a few nightjars. Since at this time of the year they were not calling, it was not possible to certify their identity, except on one or two occasions when we felt certain that they were the Indian Jungle Nightjar.

It is worth recording that perhaps the best part of our stay was the sight of the beautiful forest through which the mountain train from Mettupalaiam wormed its way. As the train zig-zagged its way up the hills we looked in rapture at nature in all her glory and variety. During our holiday we had scouted for full 12 days the hills and valleys from Ootacamund to Kottagiri and enjoyed every hour of it. But now we come to think of it, the picturesque hillsides of the railway track, whose inner beauty and bird treasures were closed to us, were one of the best areas of forest of the Ootacamund region.

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#### HOW TO, WHEN TO, AND WHY WATCH BIRDS

By

K. S. Iyankumar

Reading through the February issue of the Newsletter, I was drawn to the article on birdwatching at Ranikhet by my kind and charming friend Sh. Usha Ganguli, I was struck by three problems:

1. Which is the right age to start on the hobby?
2. How should a person new to it make a beginning?
3. In what way can this newly acquired interest be continued, and just in passing, what is the value of birdwatching to the person?

In this essay, I wish to take each of these problems and to try and give answers to them.

1. There is no age qualification for starting any new interest in life and this is true of Natural History and Birdwatching in particular. I remember as a student, going out with Sh. Usha Ganguli and she had just started and knew little about birds. This was fifteen years or so ago. Well who can visit Delhi now and being a birdwatcher have no need for her help and advice? A startling ability has been shown by my friend Ialsinh Raol, who only four years ago recognized no birds beyond the usual gamut of household hangers on like crow, pigeons, and sparrows and the like. Today he is a birdwatcher with considerable capabilities. In fact our Rajkot group owes its entire life breath to him. An equally amazing acquisition of bird knowledge has been revealed by another Rajkotian -- Yadav who makes beautiful bird portraits. It has been my happy privilege of being associated with these people from the very beginning. Thus, age has no disqualification and on the contrary, a mature person possibly makes far more spectacular progress once he has decided on taking up any interest.

Quite obviously, in all such cases, a spark of sufficient intensity has to be set off in initiating the process. Younger people, especially



school age children make willing noviciates and learn rapidly; children are interested in everything new and especially animal life proves fascinating and irresistible for small minds. But here, the continuation of the interest is dependent on encouragement from older people — most of the child naturalists are lost due to lack of interest shown in their hobby by teachers and parents, and most certainly due to lack of opportunities to pursue their pastime as also due to the divergence of interests by more compelling demands on their energies.

2. The second problem has little to it I expect. To start birdwatching, I would simply say start looking and noticing birds! There are many around. Get to develop a habit of wishing every bird you come across with a 'Ah! how do you do?' Follow the important events of their lives, song, fights, nuptials, births, deaths, etc. In fact getting to know birds is like getting to know ones neighbours — after all birds are our neighbours. If you know all the familiar faces around you, then any new comer in the area will immediately register on you; you greet him and so your number of acquaintances increases in ever widening ripples. Watch birds, the common birds around you, and also listen to them, because sound is by far the best method of locating birds, and new ones at that. To illustrate the point, while engaging a class in a written test, I allowed my mind to note all the familiar bird calls, when all of a sudden I heard a harsh double note which I had not heard before. Strolling out of the classroom I noted a small blue flycatcher in the trees outside ... my first Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. This bird is a first for Rajkot and the area. I have since then been hearing this call repeatedly through the month suggesting that this bird is spending the non-breeding months with us.

A stage soon arrives when a need for a good book on birds is felt and it is then time to acquire one. This book should not be treated as a reference volume, but one which should be read through, as then we realise the opportunities of what can be looked for in the area, increasing the avidity for adding new names to ones life list. Attempts should also be made to find kindred souls as company for this adds to the pleasure.

The third stage on the way to acquire full status among the birding set needs a good pair of field glasses. These are a high initial cost but over the years, they amply repay the expense. A binocular costing Rs400/- over ten years of service demands a saving of less than Rs4/- a month! In this manner, birdwatching becomes the cheapest hobby imaginable.

3. The interest in birds shown by young people very often as not is relegated with increased demands of a more immediately pressing nature, however the longer and happier the association young people have with the outdoors, the less delible will be the impression on their minds. They will always look around and notice birds. But for active participation, the need is for organisation of regional clubs, easily available advice and cheaply procurable literature on the subject. Newspapers in their weekly editions should be persuaded to give space for local natural history news, while all urbane areas should have parks with jungly corners. Quite often as not the many young bird fanciers are starved of company and guidance till the interest subsides. In this country, I am disappointed to say that there is little or no encouragement for younger naturalists and as often as not discouragement is the first encountered. Looking back over the years, I find that my interest in birds has been a gift of chance and the opportunities my environment by birth bestowed on me. All are not so favourably placed and with greater deploying of natural vegetation and expanding of built-up areas, the chances are getting fewer and fewer. School programmes, serials in popular picture weeklies, well laid out parks, small aviaries in public places, exhibitions of bird subjects by amateur artists, etc. are all in the order of the day.

For adults, once the interest is aroused, all he needs is to get into contact with some kindred soul and there is little chance for his interest to flag. With the years, he will find the 'call' of birds and the great outdoors associated with them irresistible.

garden. The sunbird immediately stuck out its long tongue and eagerly sipped the syrupy tea. The bird was not at all disturbed by being netted or held in hand. There is the contrast in character between the cheerful sunbird and the brave little Tailor Bird.

Individual birds differ in quarrelsomeness. While some sparrows have nipped me on being caught others have lain deceptively docile till I relaxed and enabled them to make a quick getaway.

On the ground around my house, hoopoes, magpie-robins, and Ashy Wren Warblers may feed without realising that the "other bird" may be depriving them of their food. But not so with nesting sites.

Opposite my house there are two dead coconut trees. One is about 40 feet in height and the other about 80 feet. (A coconut tree grows to destruction.) They are both frondless and have nest holes in the top ten feet. Every year we are disturbed by the raucous and varied call of the Common Myna as well as by the piercing shrieks of Roseringed Parakeets as these two species compete for these nest holes. As there are more than one pair of each species it would be interesting to watch to see how the whole wrangle ends.

The holes in the smaller tree are also used by the Spotted Owlets. No quarrels have been witnessed between the owlets and other birds except that between owlets and crows. Owlets caught in bright daylight are relentlessly chased by crows but both species get on well early morning and late in the evening.

One day, in Madras, I was watching a pair of Goldenbacked Woodpeckers. They were calling each other and tapping tree trunks. All went well until they started at the base of a tad palm tree and worked upwards in spirals. They were at once mobbed by a pair of Common Mynas which were nesting in that tree. The racket made by the mynas brought some more from the neighbourhood. The woodpeckers were driven off but they also made a lot of noise.

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#### THE FAUNA OF OOTACAMUND AT A GLANCE

By

A. Navarro, S.J.

Last year we decided, along with a small party of students, to spend our October holidays in South India. Our budding ornithologists recommended Ootacamund as an ideal spot for birdwatching. As we had only 12 days at our disposal, we determined to limit our activities to the road that snakes its way from Ootacamund to Kotagiri. We were fortunate to pitch our headquarters at "West-Brook" where the owners of the small tea-estate very kindly allowed us to use their house.

West-Brook is situated almost 6000 ft. above sea level and this gave us a feeling of being on top of the world and close to the pure air of heaven -- an ideal spot for birdwatching. In front of the estate was a large, deeply forested and verdant valley with tea plantation, groves and several patches of eucalyptus. The valley was veined by small sholas, with an intricate network of brooks and rivulets from the surrounding hills -- all of which gave us a sense of living in the neighbourhood of eternity.

As the weather at this time of the year was crisp and invigorating we found ~~our~~ our way up and down the valley easy and unfatiguing. The hills to the rear of West-Brook were mostly covered with young plantations of eucalyptus trees and interspersed with tea shrubs in colourful gardens.

From the information we received locally we came to the conclusion that for practically the last fifty years, except for the topography of the region, vast and radical changes had been taking place. The tea plantations and the overgrowth of eucalyptus have, to a large extent, replaced the exuberant and homogenous feature of the forest so typical of the region.

Now ecology and environment are the main factors that favour prosperous birdlife. Even when birds possess a high degree of adaptability to fit themselves to a new environment, it is the time factor and eventual circumstances that may force them to adapt themselves; but even in this case, it is always on the proviso that between the different environments in which they find themselves, there will always be a certain proportion of affinity to each. Many ornithologists are of the opinion that climatic conditions with various altitudes play an important role here; but this fact, in my view, will not enjoy its full value unless it maintains its own typical flora.

But, here at Ootacamund it turned out to be just the reverse. And why? Obviously, because the eucalyptus trees and the tea plantations do not afford birds either shelter or food. In other words, birds in such a locality are deprived of that shelter and that sense of security which an exuberant and luxuriant forest quite patently offers them. As regards food it should be plain that homogenous vegetation will provide them with food, not only in abundance but of sufficient variety to satisfy the requirements of specific diets in certain species.

Under such circumstances we saw that birdlife, once so superbly flourishing and plentiful in this region of Ootacamund, was at present rather on the decline, not only in variety but in numbers as well. We therefore limited our excursions to the sholas in the beginning. We found the sholas to be rather small and rather distant from one another; in fact, they were almost devoid of birdlife, with hardly a flight of multicoloured denizens to greet our eyes. However, we found a few of them still so thickly covered with vegetation as to be almost impenetrable in some parts. This gave us an idea of what that forest might have been in days long past, before their present denuded condition.

But all was not despair. Along the brooks and rivulets we came across many of the common birds such as bulbuls, babblers, warblers, flycatchers, shrikes, wagtails, and a few Tringas. The slopes of the hills that had not yet fallen under the tyranny of the cultivator were still covered with a light sweep of forest, more or less of bushes and medium-sized trees with plenty of undergrowth. Strangely enough, here were more birds to be seen than elsewhere.

Besides the common varieties we found chats, thrushes, woodpeckers, munias, bee-eaters, drongos, ~~crow~~-pheasants, doves, quails, sunbirds, barbets, parrots, laughing thrushes, and minivets. On the more open countryside we met larks, pipits and wagtails. We also entered some patches of reserved forest. Here we found the Black Bulbuls, Microcelis psaroides -- in large numbers. Then the Velvetfronted Nuthatch and the White-eye were also very numerous. We saw the Yellow and White Browed Bulbul; the Indian Grey Tit, the Chloropsis, the hornbills, and few owls and a fair number of flycatchers. The most common flycatcher was the ubiquitous White-spotted Fantail Flycatcher which was found on every kind of haunt. As for the Nilgiri Laughing Thrushes, we saw hurricanes of them gliding through the reserves and their neighbourhood as well as in the scrap ever-glades. We were fortunate to see a few green pigeons here; but the most common pigeon was the Nilgiri Wood Pigeon, Columba elphinstoni. The Jungle Wildcock, true to its name, may apparently only be seen on the reserves.

But only once did we behold the Bourdillon's Great-eared Nightjar. On two other occasions and separately, we saw the Wood Cock. These two birds, with the addition of a glorious quintette: Bourdillon's Blackbird, the Nilgiri Laughing Thrush, the Black and Orange Flycatcher, the Nilgiri Verditer Flycatcher and the Little Sealy-bellied Woodpecker, were the most interesting and scientifically satisfying birds we encountered during these holidays. What the odour of lilacs in a New England spring or the scent of orange groves in Valencia would be to a poet, the sight of these exquisite and breath-taking birds were to us.

Against this background of beauty, we noticed the scarcity of birds of prey.

Coming to the question of "Why watch birds?" there is first one answer: "Why do anything?". Birds delight the aesthetic susceptibilities of men: their beauty of form, colour and motion are a joy to watch. The problems of their vigorous lives are a challenge to human intelligence. Birdwatching leads a person into varieties of activities by virtue of its many facets -- art, scientific query, photography, aviculture, and an outdoor life of the most strenuous type, morning walks, cheerful picnics, fowling, etc. Few hobbies then are more complete, more satisfying for people of all ages, bridging gaps between ages and nations. From the utilitarian view, birds are closely linked with pest control. They destroy vast quantities of insects and rodents, but at times they pilfer crops to the momentary annoyance of cultivators. Yet, on the balance they are by far the vivacious friends of man sharing his unique home the Earth.

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OCCURRENCE OF THE NIGHT HERON NYCTICORAX N. NYCTICORAX  
(LINN.) AT ERNAKULAM, KERALA

By

N.G. Pillai

According to the Ornithology of Travancore & Cochin (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc., Vol. 39:59) and the BIRDS OF TRAVANCORE AND COCHIN (p. 416) the night heron is neither common, nor is there any record of its breeding in this area. Hence, this note on a nesting colony of these birds at Ernakulam may be of interest to your readers.

Nesting is in progress at the time of writing this. The birds are established on a ~~serpent~~ grove standing in ~~xxxx~~ a private compound, in front of the Ravipuram temple, a well-known Hindu shrine at the southern end of Ernakulam. The temple faces the harbour and is hardly three-quarters of a mile from the waterfront. The grove, almost on the bend of the road which cuts the 70 foot highway, a few yards to the west, is a tangle of trees like the Alstonia, Holigarna and Artocarpus and various bushes, festooned with creepers and hardy climbers. The tallest among the trees is the Alstonia, whose crown must be about 50-60 ft. from the ground.

The birds greeted me with a wild cacophony on the morning of the 22nd February, when I walked up in the direction of the temple. They seemed agitated and my feeling was that they were wrangling for favoured perches as they settled down for the day. Just then one bird after another arrived and landed on the clump with nesting material in its beak and disappeared into the depths of the foliage -- which proclaimed that the nesting season was on.

Roughly, there may be about 4-5 birds in the colony, made up of black-capped, black-backed adults and brown-blotched juveniles. No other species was noticed in this company. Among the adults, some had red feet and others yellow ones. The legs of the young birds were a greenish yellow. In carriage and markings, these juveniles reminded one of a curlew, especially when they rested on an exposed woody branch. The calls were a confusion of creaks and croaks, snorts and chuckles, wild shrieks and throaty protests. Amidst this din was an incessant chitz, chitz coming from the depths of the tangle. The leaves of the clump are covered by a white smear with the excrement of the birds and on 16.iii.1966 when I walked past the grove, the odour was quite powerful.

The birds foraged for nest material, not only in the grove itself, but from trees in the neighbourhood, particularly were a Polyalthia and a mango, standing on the bank of the temple tank nearby. The process of gathering the material was leisurely. The birds would settle on one of the smaller branches and tug and pull, first at one twig and then at another, with apparently no judgement about its strength or distance from the perch and quite often they would be thrown off balance. If successful, they flew back immediately to the grove. On the 19th I found them visiting an ancient mango tree weighted with Loranthus nearly half a mile away. Birds came and went from this tree in a regular stream. Both red-legged and yellow-legged individuals were seen to carry twigs to the

nesting site. The nests all seem well hidden in the foliage.

It was last year that I came across these birds at Ernakulam for the first time on 2.iv.1965 to be exact, at the same serpent grove. There were then about 20-30 birds, composed of adults and young, which remained at this spot till 23.vi.1965. No nesting activity was noticed during this time. Crows used to harass them and Pariah Kites sometimes dived low to investigate the bickerings in the gathering. People of the locality were familiar with the bird and gave me the name Pakal-Umma which freely translated would mean 'daytime diner'.

Only once during his 6-month survey of the birds of Travancore and Cochin in 1933, did Dr. Salim Ali come across the night heron — a small colony which roosted on the banks of the Ponnani River. In my own experience too, I have only once instance of a bird being seen, at Tiruvallom, on the outskirts of Trivandrum — a specimen in the hands of a local shikari, with his fingers round its neck and the bird's feet dangling in the air, much like a domestic duck being taken to the market — and that many years ago. But Ferguson's (once Director of the Trivandrum Museum) collectors are reported to have found this species fairly common at Perumbalam in N. Travancore and at other places round the Vembanad Lake, where they are apparently protected by the inhabitants. Perumbalam is hardly 10 miles from Ernakulam, due south. This fact and the birds' apparent predilection for serpent groves, which confer on them a certain immunity, seem to lend support to Mr. Ferguson's view. Perhaps the night heron is not so scarce a bird as it is taken to be in this area.

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#### THE ROOSTING OF HOUSE SPARROWS

By

Stanley Cramp

(Reproduced by kind permission of Wild Life Observer, Dec. 1965)

For any bird a safe place to sleep at night is as essential as adequate food or a secure nest site. Yet roosting habits have been less studied by naturalists than breeding or food, and though much has been written on the communal roosts of starlings, rooks and gulls, we still have a great deal to learn about the roosting habits of even such a common bird as the house sparrow.

A few years ago I tried to find all the communal roosts of sparrows in an area of some  $3\frac{1}{2}$  square miles of central London, centred on Bloomsbury, where I live. I managed to track down 24 different roosts in this relatively small area, varying in size from 20 to 2,140 birds. There were more roosts than I had expected, but even so I almost certainly overlooked some, for sparrow roosts are harder to find than starling roosts. They are usually less noisy and much smaller; moreover sparrows fly to them in small parties, or even ones and twos, often not in a very direct line, whilst the large bustling flocks of starlings fly so straight that you can often deduce the approximate site of a roost from a few observations made in different sectors several miles from it. And not all the chirping gatherings of sparrows towards dusk, known in London as sparrows' chapels, are in fact roosts. If you wait patiently you may find that as it grows darker the birds slip away to roost elsewhere, or retire to their nest-holes nearby.

#### ON THE EMBANKMENT

I started my investigations in July, when the roosts are hardest to find. They were all small then, none holding more than fifty birds, because the adult sparrows were still breeding and mostly roosting in their nests, and the leaves on the trees and creepers easily hid the sleeping forms. As the autumn progressed, most of these small roosts were gradually deserted and fewer, but much larger roosts were formed, all of which were in plane trees. Two of them, in Euston Square and along the embankment by the Thames, held over 2,000 sparrows in mid-winter, although it would seem that the bare branches of the planes could give little protection during the long cold nights. The sparrows slept on the lower branches, from about twenty feet upwards, and in several cases flocks of

starlings occupied the tops of the trees. Most starlings prefer the more sheltered ledges on buildings in the winter months, but I have only once found sparrows roosting on a building — a mere handful of birds scattered among the crevices of an ornamented stone porch. Yet many sparrows, of course, roost in buildings — in their nest-holes, and you can see sparrows taking material to their nests outside the breeding season to keep their sleeping quarters in good repair.

During the winter, the total numbers of sparrows at the big roosts did not vary greatly (despite some irregular fluctuations which suggested that some birds at times changed from one roost to another), but in April there was a very sharp drop in numbers just before nesting began in earnest, and by May and June I could find only a handful of birds using communal roosts.

#### SUBURBAN ROOSTS

During the winter I also tried to map the gathering areas of the main roosts. These were irregular in shape, and overlapped in places; most sparrows flew only a few hundred yards to sleep, and none flew more than 1-4 miles. On the outskirts of London, however, some sparrows must fly much further, for even in winter larger sparrow roosts have been recorded, despite a lower density of sparrows in the suburbs, while one late autumn roost, when young birds swell the population, held about 19,000 sparrows. Even this pales besides a roost reported from Egypt in the late summer which held about one hundred thousand house sparrows.

Different species vary greatly in the amount of time they spend sleeping, and usually those that retire late rise early — and not the reverse as at first you might expect. This may well be connected with the need to get enough food, especially in the short days of winter. Sparrows, which can usually rely on ample supplies of bread put out for them in London as elsewhere, are amongst the first birds to go to roost and the last to awaken. In winter, almost all are gathered in the roost before sunset, and most of them up to half an hour or so before this, and they do not leave until sunrise or even later, long after the blackbirds and starlings are up and about.

#### PRIVATE HOLES

Sparrows, like starlings, will roost both communally and in their nest-holes. Why do some prefer warm holes, while others choose the bare branches of trees (and some even switch between the two)? In his monograph of the house sparrow (Collins, 1963) Dr Summers-Smith has suggested that sparrows prefer to roost in holes, but when these are in short supply will roost communally. In my study area, from a rough calculation based on sample densities, I believed that well over 50 per cent used the communal roosts, although I knew of numbers of suitable but unused nest holes. However, Summers-Smith suggests that climate might also be a factor; in higher latitudes the sparrows must use holes to survive during the severe winters, whereas further south they are free to choose and communal roosts are more frequent. Certainly, his sparrows in a suburb in north-east England had no communal roost, whereas further south in central London, which is several degrees warmer at night than even the surrounding countryside, over half the sparrows preferred to roost socially, and in southern Spain and France I have seen much larger sparrow roosts than any I have met in Britain.

Still much of this is speculation, and a definite answer can only be given where there have been more careful studies of sparrow roosting habits in different parts of the country. This needs more and more, and for most people has the disadvantage that in winter it can only be done at the weekends. But it's mainly exciting, and anyone might help to answer one of the many puzzles about the roosting of house sparrows.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Bombay group is reminded of the request made earlier about submitting a list of all birds seen in the Tulsi Lake area during this season. The authorities of the Aarey Milk Colony are interested in having such a list on hand — perhaps with the ultimate object of being able to hand it out to visitors of the National Park and encourage the hobby of birdwatching. Kindly therefore send a list of your observations to the Editor by 30th May this year.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is nice to be able to correspond with birdwatching friends in Pakistan again now that mail services have been resumed. Mr. T. J. Roberts has sent in a fine piece on the birds of Manchar Lake, for the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society. After it appears in the Journal permission will be sought to reproduce it in this Newsletter.

: c \*\*\*\*\*

Readers will perhaps find the extract from the Wild Life Observer interesting and helpful and will indicate how we can set about studying sparrows at their roost. Almost every town in India has sparrow roosts which are easy to observe.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### Baikal Teal in Rajasthan

On 4th January 1966, I happened to be in a duck shoot at Kharwa, a place about 30 miles from Ajmer. This was arranged by the Thakur Sahab of Kharwa, a keen shikari.

During the shoot, a duck was picked up, very near to where I was sitting with my binoculars. I asked the picker to bring it to me as it seemed to me a little peculiar in colour. I could not identify it when it was brought to me except that it was a teal of some kind. When the shoot was over, I asked this duck to be identified. No one present there could identify. H.H. of Kisengarh emphatically said: "I have never seen this duck shot in Rajasthan." We all were a little excited and on return to the Palace consulted a book on Game Birds of India, a very old but finely illustrated book, published in 1890. I forget the name of the author. This book had an illustration comparable to the teal. On closer examination after reading its description, we found that it was a Baikal Teal. It said that Baikal Teal is a rare straggler in India and its regular path of migration falls further east of India. With their permission, I brought the teal for skinning. Later on, I consulted Stuart Baker and Whistler. Both say, it is a rare straggler.

Many years have passed since these books were published. I would like to know if this teal is still considered a rare straggler or has any change been noticed.

I have skinned this teal and it now hangs in our Museum. I will have to take more care, if I know that it is rare.

R.N. Chatterjee  
Mayo College, Ajmer

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### "Placing the Family" - Some Comments

I wish to make the following comments in reference to Mrs. Jamal Ara's article "Placing the Family" in Newsletter for December 1965.

Mrs. Jamal Ara in her classification of birds in her article has made certain statements which are not correct. For example, in Accipitres: Diurnal birds of prey, she states that: "The eggs are white and never more than two." Now this is far from correct as many birds of prey lay as many as three to five eggs. Nor are all birds of prey lay white eggs. These statements cannot be

generalized.

This kind of article is not based on facts and hence would be very misleading to a novice.

Mrs. Jamal Ara also says: "They are vegetarians (this is evidently a slip of the pen or a printing error) and often destructive." Now birds of prey are no more destructive than a lot of other birds, especially seed-eating birds. Birds of prey may sometimes take a young domestic fowl or so but because of that they cannot be branded as destructive.

I would like to make it clear that my intention is not to criticise Mrs. Jamal Ara, who contributes articles quite regularly to the Newsletter, which is far more than I can say for myself. All I wish to say is that it would be much better if members restricted their statements to facts.

K.R. Sethna

Mylenoney Estate, Chikmagalur Dist  
Mysore

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A Correction - Mrs. Jamal Ara's reply to above

I am grateful to Mr. K.R. Sethna for pointing out the unfortunate mistake which was a typing error confusing two different articles. Due to oversight on my part it went to press uncorrected. On reading the Newsletter I wanted to send the correction but due to my present mental condition it slipped my mind completely.

It should read as follows:

"The eggs are either spotted with red or are plain white. One or more in number. The birds of prey are essentially carnivorous, and as a whole are exceedingly useful, either as scavengers or as destroyers of vermin and insects

I am exceedingly grateful for criticism of any kind pointing out such errors.

Mrs. Jamal Ara

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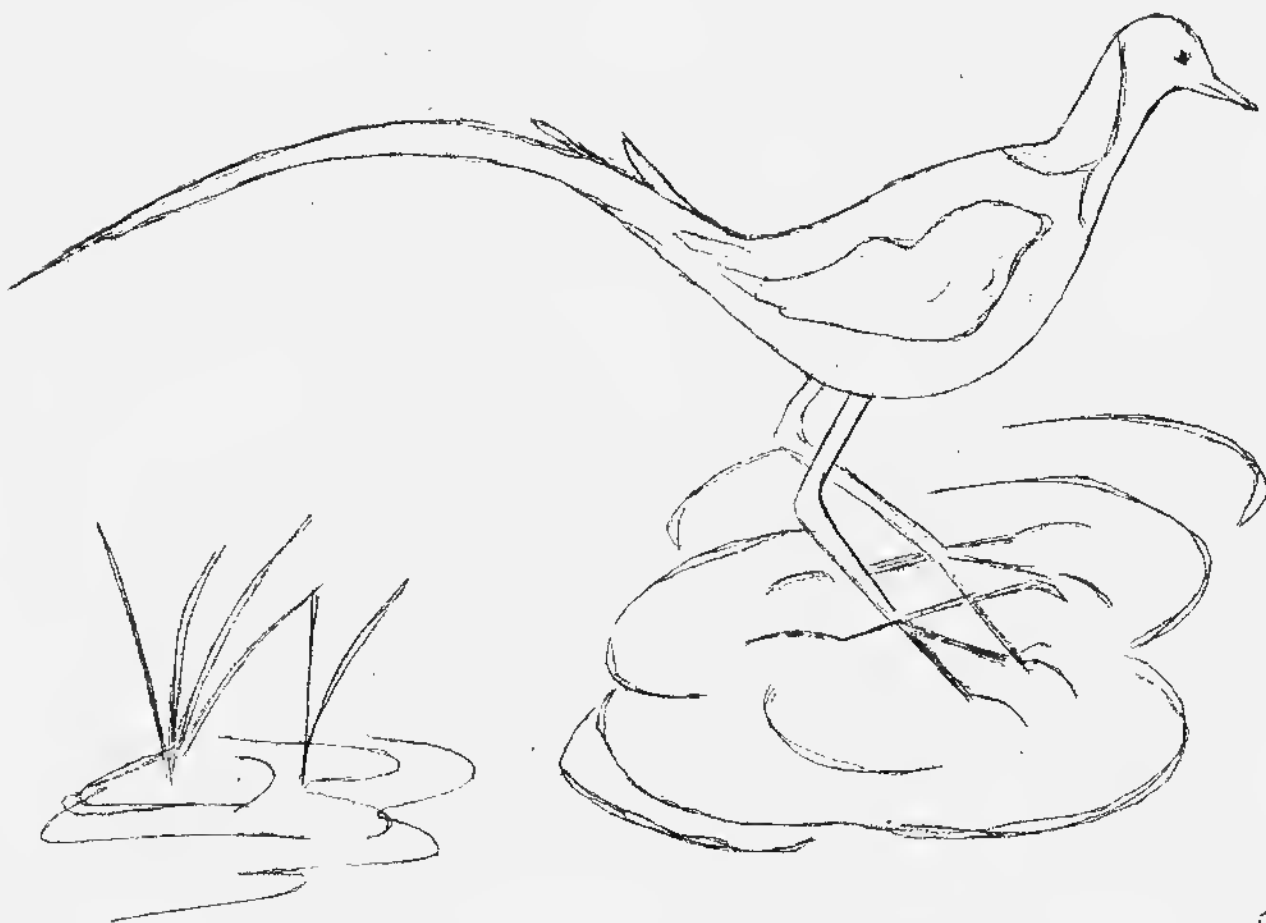


# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

MAY 1966

VOLUME 6 No. 5



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# NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDMATCHERS

Vol. 6, No. 5

May 1966

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## SOME ASPECTS IN THE BREEDING BEHAVIOUR OF THE COMMON PARIAH KITE

By

Robert B. Grubh

Some time back I had the opportunity to study the mating behaviour of a pair of Common Pariah Kites (Milvus migrans) on which I find very little published information except a note by Salim Ali in 1926.

I first noticed the birds when they were mating on the roof of a building adjacent to the Society's office at Malkeshwar Road. As soon as the mating was over the male sat beside the female. There was a slight but distinct difference in the colour of the plumage. The cock was slightly ashy grey all over while the hen had slight rufous wash. The female appeared to be bigger in size. Later, the difference in their coloration was confirmed by watching them at subsequent matings. I succeeded in finding their nest, situated at the height of about 30 feet, on a mango tree just behind the building where they mated.

I have no doubt about the identity of the pair as I did not see any other kite coming and alighting in the area in which the pair was normally present. There was another pair on a palm tree about half a furlong from the mango tree. That pair was never noted to enter this area and vice versa. Occasionally when either of the bird flew out of sight, it always returned within ten minutes or so.

## M a t i n g :

The pair mated without any obvious courtship display. The male flew straight to the female and alighted on her. Once, while the female was sitting about a yard away, the male bird walked up to her and mated. During copulation, the male uttered several short, high-pitched cries which ended as soon as the act was over. Frequently, before the end of the act, the female was noted to raise her head sidewise and upwards. Usually the male dismounted and perched near the female for a while before flying away and only on occasions he left her immediately after mating. She too did not leave her perch soon after mating. The female was never seen to resent the male's advances although there was little courtship display.

The birds more or less mated again and again at the same place where they were observed to mate for the first time. But they did not mate only here; for instance, they were also observed to mate on the mango tree where their nest was placed. However, as far as I could see they mated only within a limited area (territory?). Matings were observed during almost all periods of the day -- sometimes even after 6.30 p.m.

Salim Ali (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 31:524, 525) observes the following regarding the mating behaviour: "Copulation among the kites continues generally. The act is performed many times each day. Have not been able to make a full day's number, but by 10 in the morning, before leaving for office have frequently observed from three to six times. The birds usually return to the same neighbourhood for the act, time after time and very often, the female does not leave her perch in the interval at all. The male bird alights on her back from the air and balancing himself by flapping his wings, flies off directly the act is completed. The female whistles in a particular manner when wishing to attract her mate and the cock bird keeps up a series of distinctive short, sharp crescendo whistles or screams which end up abruptly when the act is over . . . on February 13, copulation was observed at 6.45 p.m., just as dusk was setting in . . . during the act and while the male was on the female's back and emitting the short, sharp 'screams' to which I have referred, the female very often turned her head back to look at him, bringing her bill quite close to his."

In the following aspects the behaviour of the pair of kites observed by Dr. Salim Ali agrees with those observed by myself:

1. The male bird alone cried during copulation.
2. The female turned her head upwards during the act of copulation although I cannot say it did so on all occasions. Dr. Salim Ali also refers to J.S. Huxley who has observed this type of behaviour in the Oyster-catcher.

In the following aspects, the behaviour differs.

1. The female did not whistle in order to attract the male.
2. The male did not alight on the female's back only from the air by flying towards her.
3. The male did not always fly off directly when the act was over.

## F e e d i n g :

During the period of observation, I did not come across any

instance when the female got her food by her own effort. It was the male who brought her food. This behaviour is considered general among the birds of prey. On one occasion the male brought a big rat and alighted about 20 ft. from the female. Immediately the female flew to the spot. The male left the rat there and went to the top of the next building. She began feeding. After a long while he went near her and kept quiet. Now she flew off leaving the remaining food, on which he started feeding. Many times when he brought food to the mango tree, she quickly approached him, got the food and began feeding, sitting away from the male. The male neither refused to give nor tried to share the food. Once, however, he brought some food and started eating himself, ignoring his mate who was moving rapidly after him; but shortly afterwards the female was seen feeding while the male kept at a distance.

Whenever the female had any food with her the crows pestered her. If they came too close, she stopped eating, lowered the head, looked straight at the 'intruder' and uttered sharp loud yelps, which may be expressed as: kek-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-kek. While voicing this 'threat call' the lower jaw moved up and down conspicuously. Often, as though in response to this call, the male swooped down on the crows and chased them away.

#### Nest Protection:

The nest had taken the finale shape, when I saw it. A few additions were made afterwards. I could not see all the nesting materials because of the position of the nest. I could see the stout outer twigs along, some of them having long pointed thorns. Cotton ropes, dirty rags and a black ladies' hair net were hanging from the nest. The nest had enough space to accommodate both the kites at the same time.

From the first day of observation (25th January 1965) till 30th January, the nest was not continuously occupied, and the kites were away from it for long periods. Matings also were observed during this period. Day by day they began to spend more time on or near the nest. They rearranged the twigs frequently. At times they pecked at each other gently with closed bill, when both tried to arrange the same twig. Mating still continued, but mainly on the mango tree itself. From February 2nd onwards they protected the nest carefully. The nest was never left unguarded. One of the birds usually the female was always on the nest, leaving it only for short intervals when the male took her place. Whenever the male brought food while the female was on the nest, she would not get out of the nest to receive it, but would wait for the male to enter the nest, and then collect the food from him and go out of the nest for feeding, leaving the male to sit in it.

Most probably, the eggs were laid now and incubation had begun. But I am not sure of this point, for the nest was not examined. During these days of 'incubation' the kites strongly protected their nest from the enemies, here only crows. It was interesting to watch their behaviour during this period. Whenever a crow or crows approached the nest, the response of the kites varied along with the sex and the conditions described below.

When the female alone was on the nest, she voiced the same threat call with the same body posture as she did when pestered by crows while feeding. This call was in most cases followed by the male chasing away the intruders. When the male was alone on the nest he cried and behaved in the same way as the female did, without leaving the nest. The female bird did not appear and

When the female was on the tree (not on the nest) and the male not in the vicinity, she swooped towards the intruder, at times with a single kek and alighted near the nest, but she never chased out the crows actively. Her actions were rather passive.

When both the birds were on the tree (not on the nest), the male alone lunged forward and scattered the intruders as well as the other crows sitting on the tree, off the scene, the female not even making the threat call.

When both the birds were on the nest they both guarded it from within, without getting out and they uttered the threat calls vigorously.

The crows did not seem to have any fear of the kites. They just kept themselves out of harm's way and gave the kites whatever trouble they could give. Some times two crows approached the nest simultaneously, one in front and the other from behind. Once a Common Crow and a Jungle Crow joined to perform this trick. But never did the kite that was on the nest try to chase them leaving the nest at the mercy of the other crows. This behaviour in my opinion is of vital importance for the survival of the species. Stuart Baker (NIDIFICATION OF BIRDS 4:92) says, 'I have never seen either of the present show any real resentment to the taking of young or eggs . . . The only demonstration I have ever noticed was the swooping of the bird towards the intruders, but always at very discreet distance and even this was most exceptional.' The behaviour of this pair of Pariah Kites does not seem to be in accordance with the above statement. However, as I did not know whether there was any egg or young in the nest, I should not comment on this.

Observations went on without any noticeable change till 4th February. On that day, at 1.00 p.m., both the birds left the nest for a minute or so. Within that time a crow entered the nest, did something with its head bent down and then flew away. I do not know what it actually did. Soon after the male kite came and sat on the nest. The next day in the evening when I watched the nest, there was no bird on it. Only about half an hour after I started watching both the kites came to the nest. The male stepped out of the nest sooner and frequently made long shrill cries. Up to 7.00 p.m. till darkness completely masked my sight, the bird was sitting on a branch away from the nest.

I do not know what happened to these birds. Perhaps the crow which entered the unguarded nest might have damaged the eggs, if there were any. Any way after that incident a definite change was evident in their behaviour. This condition lasted till 12th February when at 9.25 a.m. the birds were seen mating once again. Next day another mating was observed. Now the nest was not so carefully guarded as before, although driving away of the crows continued.

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## BIRD QUARRELS

By

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan

On reading Sri Nilakanta's article on bird quarrels, I was reminded of certain squabbles for which peevishness and nervousness rather than competition for food, nest-sites or perches appeared to have been the cause.

Many years ago I used to pass a Morinda (a sort of wild fig with rasp-like leaves and an abundance of sulphur-yellow fruits) every day. When the tree was full of fruits a male koel used to spend hours on the tree. Though the branches were laden with ripe fruit and I seldom saw the koel eating anything there, the koel would not allow any other bird to go near this tree. Whenever other koels or smaller birds like the bulbuls attempted to land on a branch, the koel would at once drive them away. He had more of the Man of Property about him than even the owner of a nesting territory.

The Chloropses (at any rate Jerdon's) also behaves like a dong in the manger though its desire to keep others off has something to do with the food ration. Once a Chloropses arrives on a twig bearing berries or flowers, it spends more time driving other birds away than in feeding.

Once I witnessed a prolonged quarrel between a Spotted Dove and a Pied Crested Cuckoo. They were in a low bush in scrub country (the compound of the Christian College, Tambaram) and spent more than half an hour scrapping. The cuckoo's insistence on coming back to the bush from which the Dove always drove it away seemed to be as illogical as was the Dove's determination to shoo it off. I did not find any nest anywhere in the neighbourhood.

Common Mynas have a curious habit of picking a quarrel with one of themselves who becomes the object of a combined assault by five or six of his (or her) kinsfolk. This starts late in the evening when the mynas are presumably on their way to the roost. A small group may be seen on top of a palmyra tree just resting and making the usual noises. Suddenly, before one knows what started it, pandemonium breaks out and all one sees is a couple of mynas tumbling 50 feet to the ground and then rolling about and pecking one another. Meanwhile the others would also have flown down and would first form a circle of vociferous spectators and then they too would, one by one, join the fray. The whole thing would end as abruptly as it had started and the flock would disperse or move off together as though nothing unusual had happened. This sort of thing seems to be more frequent during the summer months.

Having strayed from the topic of quarrels between birds of different species, let me conclude with the accounts of quarrels between birds and other animals, and birds and insects. The best example of the former is the quarrel between a squirrel and a shikra which I witnessed some 22 years ago. One would have thought that no self-respecting shikra would let a squeaking pal squirrel disturb its rest, but I found the shikra deserting its perch on being asked 'to get a move on' by the squirrel. The shikra sat on a wall up the side of which the squirrel ran. The squirrel's tactics consisted in making sudden rushes from one side of the wall towards the shikra. I do not remember now whether the squirrel uttered its usual ear-splitting alarm calls, but it had no difficulty in persuading the shikra to seek some other perch.

On many evenings some months ago I used to enjoy the sight of a dispute between a Loten's Sunbird and a dragonfly for the bare twig at the top of a tamarind tree. The twig was probably used more regularly by the dragonfly. Whenever the sunbird occupied this perch, the dragonfly would come and, by merely flying in a determined fashion towards the bird, force it fly off. But the sunbird would return at once and take possession only to be driven off again by the insect. As the sunbird seldom spent much time on this perch the technical victory may be said to have gone to the dragonfly.

Watching such incidents and trying to find the reasons for them can be an absorbing pastime.

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## KEOLADEO GHANA

By

Major A. David

Keoladeo Ghana, Bharatpur, that paradise for birdwatchers and a treat to a naturalist is within easy motorable distance of Delhi. The road approach via Mathura or Kosi Kama diversion takes about three to three and a half hours. For those who do not possess a car the Frontier Mail is ideal train to get there. The resthouse is comfortable and the warden is well informed. For a business executive or a hard pressed administrative a weekend at the sanctuary would be an ideal nerve tonic and a rest cure. For those who are rushed for time a quick visit by Frontier Mail in the morning and return by the same train would give a three and a half hours delightful relaxation. The afternoon is the resting time and the birds are less restless and give one a better opportunity to approach them. The best time to visit Keoladeo Ghana is either in November when the migrants are on their way down or February when they are on their return flight.

My last visit to the Ghana was way back in 1938 when I visited it for a different purpose, i.e. a snake hunting expedition with my reliable friend Sukh Lal the ancient snake charmer. At that time Sukh Lal was bitten by a wily and vicious three and a half feet black cobra on his index finger while trying to catch it. In half an hour he went blue all over, but his young son, hardly 14 made an incision on the spot with a sharp blade and kept on sucking the venom and the blood and spitting it out. In two hours he revived, and I gave him a cup of hot tea and we were able to continue. I asked him if he did not have any charm or native medicine (zohar mora) etc. for snake bites.

I visited the Ghana after 20 years for purely birdwatching last Sunday ( 6th February). It was then a preserve and now it is a sanctuary. The result was fantastic. The sanctuary is loaded with birds. There were a thousand greylags spread all over; about 500 Barheaded Geese, Pintails, Gadwals, Spotbills, Redheaded-, ~~and~~ White-eyed-, and Redcrested Pochards, Teals, Wigeons, Shovellers, coots in thousands, painted storks, black-necked storks, openbills, and spoonbills, pelicans, darters, and cormorants. Ibises and egrets (the big Chinese ones and the Indian variety), greyherons, the pon heron, the jack and fantail snipes, and two kinds of sandpipers and some snippets were present in sizeable proportion. The lapwings and curlews, three varieties of kingfishers, and last but not the least, the star attraction of the sanctuary, the White Siberian Crane were present. There were about 200 of them, snow white with a black patch on their stub tails. They look like the Chinese egrets from a distance but they are bigger and their beaks are



like those of storks though more pointed and smaller. More birds could be added by closer scrutiny but I think this list is enough to generate excitement among birdwatchers. This is not all: On the side line the Ghana provides sizeable herds of chitals, chinkaras (Indian Gazelle), blackbuck, blue blulls, and a couple of leopards in the bargain. Luckily we had Mr. P.D. Stracey, the great advocate of wild life preservation and the author of the famous book THE ELEPHANT GOLD with us to help in identification.

The Ghana is a great sanctuary and a unique one of its kind and can become a great national asset if developed further. Some field birds like spurfowl, painted and black partridge and even the great Indian bustard could be introduced and seasonal crops could be grown on drier patches to provide fodder and feed to the wild animals; grazing of cattle should be stopped in these localities. Fodder is already scarce and the domestic cattle apart from introducing diseases like anthrax may soon starve out the wild animals. Nature will then take over to revive the balance.

Incidentally the sign post for the sanctuary is very defective and should be rectified immediately; otherwise the would-be visitor could roan for hours without reaching anywhere.

\* \* \* \*

### THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO

By

E. W. Ramble

Before long we may expect the Pied Crested Cuckoo to arrive in the north. This is a bird which has intrigued me for years and I have particularly wondered where it come from before the onset of the monsoon and where it goes to in October.

Here in Saharanpur, in the Uttar Pradesh, we can expect it in the first fortnight in June. To give the dates of arrival which I have recorded over the years may be of interest to other bird enthusiasts.

|                |                  |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1947 : 6 June  | 1953 : 15th June |
| 1948 : 15 June | 1962 : 2 June    |
| 1949 : 3 June  | 1963 : 1 June    |
| 1950 : 12 June | 1964 : 12 June   |
| 1952 : 8 June  | 1965 : 2 June    |

Between 1954 and 1962 I was stationed at Monghyr, in Behar, which must be a good 5 or 600 miles east of Saharanpur and a little more south. Curiously enough the dates of arrival were earlier, as follows:

|                  |  |
|------------------|--|
| 1956 : 28th May  |  |
| 1958 : 18th June |  |
| 1959 : 28th May  |  |
| 1960 : 26th May  |  |
| 1961 : 30th May  |  |

1958, in Behar, was a particularly hot and dry summer and the monsoon was late which probably accounted for the very late arrival that year.

If, as is sometimes supposed, the bird winters in East Africa, it would be interesting if readers of the Newsletter could record their observations of the bird's arrival this year and it might thus be possible to plot its course across India by the observed dates. Possibly it uses the high pre-monsoon

breezes in its flight, crossing the west coast, sweeping north eastwards and then some of them turn up to the north west up the Ganges plain towards the Uttar Pradesh and Punjab.

The Pied Crested Cuckoo must lay its eggs immediately on arrival. I was once brought a young bird, fully fledged, which indicated that the hen cuckoo must have arrived many days earlier than I had actually recorded. The youngster was too advanced to have fitted into the time, allowing for the full hatching period and its growth.

They are very common during the monsoon but disappear by the end of September although I have observed a pair as late as the middle of October at Rhatar at the foot of the Chabrata hill road 50 miles north of Saharanpur.

Only once have I ever seen the bird take a grasshopper off the ground. That was at Monghyr on a very isolated hill with a solitary bush on it. The bird came off the bush from time to time to catch its prey on the grass.

On another occasion I watched a fledgling being looked after by a flock of jungle babblers. It was perched on a low twig and made such a commotion that all the birds in the flock appeared to take it food to keep it satisfied. There were no young babblers among the party. I watched this performance for a quarter of an hour before the birds were disturbed by a passer-by.

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#### TINY BIRD VETERAN

Story by T.A.G. Hungerford

(Through the courtesy of the Australian High Commission  
: News and Information Bureau)

Perth, Australia

A small grey bird with a wing span of only eight inches observed on a Swan River beach near Perth, Western Australia, in February 1966 has been revealed as an intrepid world traveller.

The bird, a Northern Siberian stint, was banded in December 1959 by a Perth bird watcher. It was trapped on February 14, 1966, with two other ringed birds of the same type at the well known haunt and observation point of wading-birds at Pelican Point, on the Swan River only about three miles from the heart of the city.

An examination of the rings proved that the stint banded in 1959 now had to its credit six return journeys between Pelican Point and its breeding ground in the tundra belt of northern Siberia.

The others had had respectively five and four yearly migrations.

While the stint's migratory route has not definitely been established, it has been suggested that the bird would follow coastlines as far as possible.

Thus, on leaving Perth for return to its breeding grounds, it would follow the Western Australian coast to a jumping off point opposite Indonesia, cross the Indonesian and Philippine islands to skirt the Asian continental coastline to its destination in northern Siberia.

Under these circumstances it would cover at least 20,000 miles on its yearly two-way journey Siberia-Western Australia-Siberia.

It would take something less than three weeks for the one way trip, seldom stopping, but living on the fat accumulated during its lazy

summer holiday on the banks of the Swan, where it makes its advent as early as September, but principally in October. It loafs through the sunny months, feeding on river algae and small water living creatures, and in April begins to think about the long trip home: the breeders go first, any bird which is sick, or instinctively does not feel itself up to the journey, winters in Western Australia.

What guided this tiny wanderer, and other which undertook similar journeys, was still the subject of research and conjecture among naturalists the world over, said Dr. Dom Serventy, the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation's principal wild life research officer in Western Australia.

Also under discussion and investigation was the possibility that along these established migratory routes diseases were spread from one part of the world to another.

At the time of an outbreak of encephalitis in the Murray Valley region of eastern Australia about a decade ago it was suggested that migratory birds might be responsible, but Dr. Serventy thought not. It was more likely, he said, that diseases would be carried by birds migrating internally within Australia.

While a number of Australian birds frequented the Pelican Point sanctuary and Australian dotterels built in the sand dunes nearby, the most interesting visitors were the sandpiper group, of which the stint was a member.

Other foreigners which visited the area were dotterels from inner Mongolia and, occasionally, Arctic tern.

The latter would be birds which had been blown by strong westerly winds out of their usual South African migration route between the Antarctic and their Scandinavian breeding grounds.

The only report received so far of the recovery of a Pelican Point bird outside Australia concerned a banded sharp-tailed sandpiper shot by a Russian hunter slightly north of the Arctic Circle in May 1961.

The band, returned to Perth through the Moscow Academy of Sciences, proved that the bird had been ringed in January 1961, by a Perth bird-watcher.

The stints trapped in February would be released after their ring numbers had been recorded; possibly to be trapped again in future years, Dr. Serventy said.

Both official and amateur bird watchers were active at Pelican Point, and data accumulated from an examination of banded birds would assist in establishing their life expectancy and migration routes.

## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### Bird migration

With reference to the remark of the author about the possibility of Northern Siberian stint being a carrier of encephalitis readers will remember that it was suggested that birds migrating between India and the USSR might be responsible for the prevalence of similar diseases in the two countries. In the Kayasanur forest of Mysore, a form of encephalitis developed, as a result of which a large number of monkeys died. It was suspected that the disease was caused by ticks, and that the ticks

travelled on the bodies of birds between India and Russia. The Bombay Natural History Society as a part of its bird migration study scheme sponsored by the World Health Organization is continuing with this investigation. The ticks collected from migratory birds are studied by the Virus Research Centre, Poona, and blood smears from migratory birds are sent to Russia for analysis at the institute of encephalitic diseases.

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### Salt Lakes in Calcutta as a bird sanctuary

The migration of several varieties duck and other species of birds from the Zoological Gardens to the Salt Lake area is a daily occurrence. The Salt Lakes now cover about 38 sq. miles of swamps most of which are used by private owners for fishing. Because of their extensive reedbeds and other aquatic vegetation it is a rich feeding ground for birds and over 200 species have been recorded in this area.

The programme to reclaim the Salt Lakes has posed a serious threat to the bird life in these marshes. A group of imaginative persons encouraged by the Governor, Miss Naidu, have submitted a memorandum for preserving at least a part of the Salt Lakes as a bird sanctuary. We hope their efforts will be successful.

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### CORRESPONDENCE

#### Birdwatching at Mira Road (W. Rly.)

Br. Navarro took me and some of my friends on a half day's outing to the Salt Pans near Mira Road (W. Rly.) on 20th March 1966 (time 1.30 to 7 p.m.), which is always a good place for birdwatching, especially from the middle of November to the end of March.

On that very warm afternoon one could see the vapours rising from the parched earth. In the beginning we could not spot any birds except some Little Stints and Sea Gulls. But towards evening our prospects changed and we saw a gorgeous specimen of the Caspian Tern with its prominent red beak -- one of the largest to be found in India. It was resting on the edge of the water in one of the salt pans. We tried to approach it stealthily to get a closer look, but it suddenly took to the air with graceful quick wing beats. We then moved on to another spot where we saw Common Swallows in great numbers and also several Palm Swifts. Br. Navarro at once told us that it was the Crested Swift which we had so often seen in one of the ravines in Khargala. All of a sudden one of our younger colleagues pointed out a huge group of tiny birds, say about a hundred, feeding upon the almost invisible organisms in the salt water. These birds all belonged to the family of Little Stints and while we were observing them, a pair of Gullbilled Terns passed over us. They had black on the top and sides of their heads. This showed that they had already acquired their summer plumage.

All round in the marsh where sea-weeds and other water plants were growing, we could hear the tiny calls of some warblers, especially of the type of Prinia. We tried our best to identify a few of these amusing birds but our attempt was of no avail as they flew across to another marsh or hid in the bushes on the slightest noise made by us. A popular feature of the day's trip was the abundance of the Grey Wagtails all of them in beautiful yellow breeding plumage. Br. Navarro remarked that they had started gathering in flocks for it was time for them to migrate to the breeding grounds in far-off European countries.

On the banks of some salt pans which were full of water we saw Little Cormorants. In the centre of these same pans the Grey Heron and the Little Egrets were busy hunting small fish for their supper.

On our way back to the station, we saw on the dusty path a few pairs of Crested Larks engrossed in picking up seeds and tiny insects. Suddenly a pair of Collared Bush Chats settled on the edge of the stalk of a dried-up plant, possibly in search of a roosting place for the night. There were very few birds in the salt pans this year as compared to some previous years in which I had the privilege of seeing hundreds of Little Stints, Red- and Green Shanks and other varieties of waders. It may be of interest to note that last year in the same area we were fortunate enough to come across Gould's Desert Chat (Oenanthe deserti atrogularis) and the Isabelline Chat (Oenanthe isabellina).

We returned home quite satisfied with our hike hoping to come back again for a full day to observe the fascinating bird life of the salt pans.

Adil Dubash  
Bombay

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Help to birdwatchers visiting the Periyar Sanctuary, Kerala

Re. the letter from Mr. Erskine Crum in the March 1966 issue of the Newsletter.

The Wild Life Officer, Thekkady, has been furnished with a list of some 180 birds which may be expected to occur in the sanctuary area. It is hoped that this list will be made available to any one who cares to ask for it at the Wild Life Office, Thekkady. Paintings of 22 birds (some common, the others uncommon but interesting for one reason or another) have also been handed over for exhibition at some suitable place so that the visitors might be induced to pay some attention to the birds of the place.

Prof. K.K. Neelakantan  
Trivandrum, Kerala

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Zafar Futchally

Editor, Newsletter for Birdwatchers  
32-A Juhu Lane  
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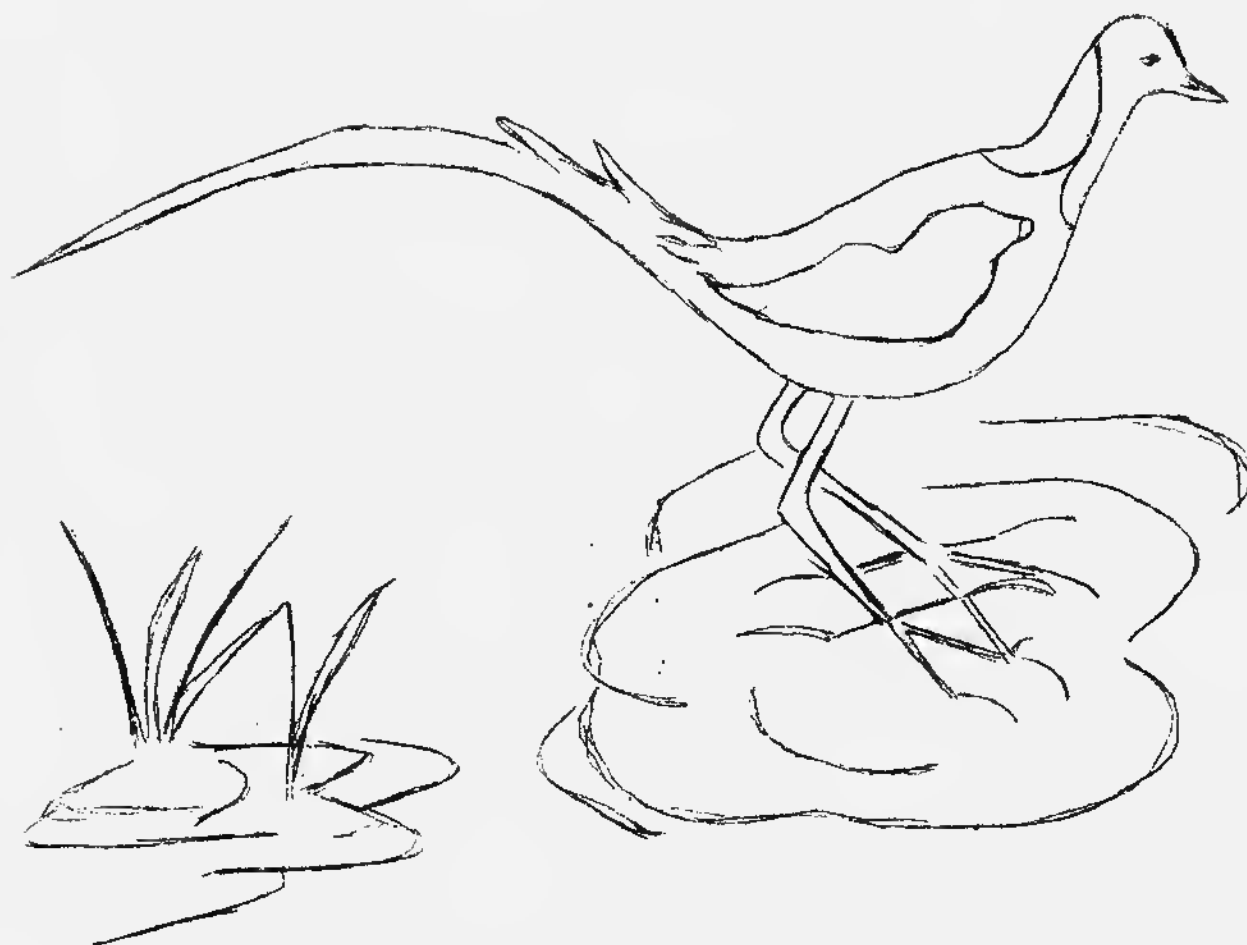
# NEWSLETTER

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## FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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# NEWSLETTER

FOR

BIRDWATCHERS

Vol. 6, No. 6

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## UNFAMILIAR VISITORS TO MADRAS

By

R.A.S. Molluish

A change of weather is a time for the birdwatcher to stand to, particularly near the coast. At the end of April, which had as usual been hot and dry in Madras, high winds hit the shore here, and brought with them torrential rain from the Bay of Bengal. It was a moment to be out on the prowl, looking for birds blown astray. I chose the 30th to visit the southern end of the lagoon at Pulicat. The sky was overcast. There had been some rain the previous night, and a big storm was in the offing: I could see it piling up over the sea to the north-east, a huge dark blue-grey wall of jagged cloud. Its assault was obviously going to bring my expedition to an abrupt end.

There was not very much in the way of bird-life on the water's edge: a Curlew, a handful of black-stomached Golden Plover, some Large and Lesser Sand Plover, with a lot of rufous on their breasts and at the sides of the head, and a smattering of Little Stint and Curlew-Sandpiper. A little way out, standing in the shallows, a dozen assorted Laridae, Caspian and Gullbilled Terns and Brownheaded Gulls. Nothing else.

So I thought, at least; and I began to fear I was going to get a drenching for nothing. The storm was barely ten minutes away. Then I caught sight of the very thing I had come out in search of -- something extraordinary and entirely unfamiliar. A pair of small, slender terns, gracefully but ineffectually trying to make headway against the freshening wind, at first glance almost entirely black. Whiskered Terns might be expected to have black patches on their stomachs at this time of the year, but here were



belly, all black. The coverts under the wing were black, too. The rest of both sides of the wing was grey, except, on the upper side, for a thick dark leading-edge to the primaries and a whitish line aft of it, and a pale greyish white area somewhere on the coverts. The tails, above and below, were the only parts of the birds that were pure white. They were short and squarish, without streamers, like a Whiskered Tern's. I could not distinguish any colour on the beak and legs; the beaks looked black, but then so do the beaks of Whiskered Terns unless one can get very close to them. In any case, it was blowing hard now and there was no question of a leisured examination of these creatures through a telescope. I barely had time to make the briefest of notes and pack away my gear before all the birds in sight were suddenly hurled away like fallen leaves before the onrush of the storm, and a few seconds later the whole world was smudged out in sideways rain.

These were Whitewinged Black Terns, Chlidonias leucoptera (Temminck). Though not apparently unknown in Ceylon, the absence of published records of this species for South India suggests that it has rarely if ever been observed here. When Mr. Humayun Abdulali recorded it from Bombay (1950, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 49:310) he said it had not been reported before from anywhere in peninsular India. Stuart Baker, in the second edition of the Fauna, described it as common all down the east coast, but he did not support the remark with evidence or say what led him to such a belief. It is not true now. Commenting on Baker's statement, Whistler (J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 39:247) wrote, "The unwary might be led by this to expect to find the bird normally in the Presidency, so it may be as well to emphasize the fact that the Old Fauna (4:309) states that it has not been clearly identified from any part of India west of Tipperah and I have seen no evidence to make me disagree with this statement."

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## BIRD AMAZONS

By

Jamal Ara

Mrs. Bustard-Quail has claim to fame as one of the few females of birds who dominate their males; the others in India are the hens of the Little Button Quail and the Button Quail.

These birds can be distinguished from true quails, especially in hand, by their having only three toes, the hind-toe being missing. If you shoot or buy a three-toed quail you can be sure it is one of this strange tribe.

In most birds, Indian or belonging to other parts of the world, the females are smaller and less gorgeously plumaged than the males. The duller colouring of the females in most species has a protective function for the hens sitting on the nest are less conspicuous and less liable to attack.

The hens of the three-toed quails abhor all domestic responsibilities and are the dominant partners of the short-lived marriage. They lay the eggs but do not sit over the nest. They leave the incubation and rearing of the young to the males.

The females parcel out the territory too and use their gorgeous plumage for both intimidating rival females and for courting the males. The fights for territory begin as symbolic demonstrations with much aggressive gesturing and posturing. These quails have not much song, but whatever capacity for making noise during courtship there is, is largely among the females.

The small bush or heavy grass in cultivated fields or the under-growth of light forest which these birds tenant throughout India, Ceylon and Burma resounds during the territorial display with loud, drumming and booming sounds. That is the voice, call or song, as you please, of these bird amazons. They first drum Drr--rr--r--r--rrr and then bellow out from puffed breasts and throats boom - boom - boom. The hen bustard-quails are the loudest, while the button-quails and the little button quails have muffled voices of the same pattern, a cross between a coo and a purr. At its poorest this call sounds like a plaintive moan.

These bird amazons are polyandrous. They fight over a male but as soon as they are mated and the eggs are laid -- in a shallow hollow on the ground, protected by a bush or grass, they leave the males to brood. The nests are often tunnelled through a dense tuft of sirki or moonj grass and the clutch of three to four eggs, greyish white profusely speckled with reddish brown or blacking purple, laid at the back, the brooding male going and coming through the hole in the grass.

The hens having laid the eggs wander in search of new territory and new males. Sometimes a few hens will be together for a short while in the undecided period after a mating, but soon the grass widows, with renewed interest in mating, will start fighting. Stuart Baker kept many males together in captivity but the females would always fight each other to death. So desperate is the fight under natural conditions that it is possible to walk up and catch two fighting hens. In North Bihar bird-trapper know of this pugnacity of the hens of these quails and catch the with the aid of decoy females, mind it, not males.

The victor of a fight gets the male over whom the fight has ranged. The male himself looks a subdued creature and proceeds to line with feather and grass the nest it is his lot to make.

The breeding season of these quails is long, practically extending over the entire year. The fights intermittently take place at all hours, morning, noon, and night. In one season a female may have had four or five 'husbands' in succession.

It is difficult to call the mere males of these birds by so descriptive a name as 'cock', implicit as it is with assertion and fight.

The Bustard-Quail (Turnix suscitator), called 'Gulu' in Hindî, is an almost tailless ground bird, the size of a sparrow but more roundish and plump. In the bush it seems a darkly and heavily barred bird with a slight whitish apology for a crest over the black-spotted head, the chin, throat, neck and breast are velvet black, and strike one's eyes if the bird raises itself. That is rare for it is a great skulker. The smaller male is duller than the hen and has a white chin and black and buff banded breast.

The Little Button-Quail (Turnix sylvatica) is smaller than the Bustard-Quail, one of the smallest game birds, and so tiny, light and puffed out it looks that it is called lava in Hindî. It is readily recognized by the white line that traverses down the centre of its head. It has much yellowish whiteness in its finely mottled feathers and has a stiff pointed tail and a slaty bill.

The Indian Button-Quail (Turnix tanki) is the same size as the bustard-quail and is called the burra lava to show that it is bigger than Little Button-quail. A rusty red broad collar on the neck and the upper breast of the hens is important for its identification.

All these three-toed quails are found all over India, except Punjab and Rajputana. A local race of bustard-quail inhabits the area round Calcutta and the Botanical Gardens are the favourite fighting and nesting ground. .

Three-toed quails with similar habits are found in Australia and Africa. Apart from these three-toed quails the only other birds known to have dominant females are the red-necked and grey phalaropes. These birds of the water breed near the Arctic Circle and so we miss their fights nor do we see them in their breeding plumage. They are winter visitors to India and are called tuhi.

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## SOME BIRDS IN OUR GARDEN

By

Zafar Futehally

I saw many interesting birds in our garden at Andheri, Bombay, during the past few months. In the cold weather I enjoyed watching two Redbreasted Flycatchers, a male and a female, flitting about in their characteristic vivacious way from one part of the garden to another and occasionally descending on a stone on the ground. The male and the female occupied two different sectors of the garden and did not seem to have any contact with each other during the winter sojourn away from their breeding grounds. They indulged in a low whistle which always indicated their presence. If they kept quiet one would hardly see them. Blyth's Red Warbler was another winter visitor whose presence was indicated by its sharp chek, chek call. As the hot weather approached this bird started to warble and sing quite melodiously. The Eastern Grey Wagtail always comes to us some time about October and invests the garden with a dainty quality. We had the good fortune of having with us Dr. Frank Fraser Darling of the Nature Conservancy and the well-known author of A PELICAN IN THE WILDERNESS, A HERD OF RED DEER, and several other books, for a couple of days. He thought that the wagtail represented more than any other avian, the true essence of a bird by its grace and beauty. One day suddenly a sharp flycatcher call indicated the presence of a Paradise Flycatcher. This bird stayed in our garden for a fortnight and then moved away.

During February and March another set of birds came into prominence. There was a nest of a Purplerumped Sunbird and we watched the female working hard at feeding the chicks. The male is not too keen about domestic chores. I managed to put a plastic ring round the leg of one of the chicks but never saw this chick again. I hope my ringing was not the cause of its death. Its companion which was not ringed was seen by us on many subsequent days being fed by the parents. The cheep, cheep call of the young one drew our attention at all hours of the day.

Golden Orioles also flashed through our garden at this time at break-neck speed. It is amazing how they escape disaster by colliding with the branches of trees through which they dart along. Some years back a young oriole came to grief by dashing against the window pane of an open window and caused us much pain by dying the next day. I am sure that these birds are nesting in our garden, but I have not been able to find the nest yet.

Ashy Wren Warblers, Tailor Birds, and Spotted Owlets were the other species which thrust themselves on our attention during these months.

In early April the Magpie Robin was easily the most eye-catching bird. Its song in the morning indicated that a territory has been acquired and a few days ago I found the female carrying nesting material under the Mangalore tile roof of our house. The male does not help at all with the building, but accompanies the female back and forth on her material carrying trips to ensure that she is doing her job. But the bird which has really won our hearts this season is the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher a pair (I am almost certain the progeny of the bird which nested in our garden last year) built a nest in a shrub just three feet from the ground. This was in early April. I am afraid we watched the birds too intently at their nest making, so they abandoned the site and started to build at the identical spot on a white Ixora shrub where the parents had built last year. Two eggs were laid and incubation commenced, but after two or three days a garden lizard presumably, devoured the eggs. The birds built a third nest on a Quisqualis creeper and we watched them at work for a couple of hours on the first day. Curiously, no progress was made on the subsequent days and we suspected that the reason was a prowling bloodsucker lizard on the creeper which perhaps made the birds realize that further efforts would be doomed to failure. I drove away the predator and was delighted to find after a week that the birds re-started to build at another place on the Quisqualis just a few feet away from where the previous nest was intended to be. This morning (19th May) I had the pleasure of seeing the first chick and the second egg will perhaps hatch tomorrow.

Postscript. May 23rd: I was out of Bombay from the 20th evening till the evening of the 22nd. When I returned the nest was empty. I am sure the indefatigable couple will build again.

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SALT LAKES AS BIRD SANCTUARY : LAND RECLAMATION  
AND HUNTERS WREAK HAVOC

(With a map)

(Reproduced from Statesman, Calcutta)

By Special Representative of the  
Statesman in Eastern India

The migration of hundreds of birds from whatever remains of the Salt Lakes on the eastern fringe of Calcutta to the Zoological Gardens at the break of dawn for shelter during the day is not season but a daily occurrence.

Wagtails, swallows, ducks, snipes, plovers, sandpipers and others all flee their natural habitat during the day when it turns into a favourite hunting ground for bird hunters from Calcutta. Not protected by the West Bengal Wild Life Preservation Act, they are completely at the mercy of the pleasure-seekers whose wanton depredations continue throughout the year.

The precarious and pitiable existence of these winged animals has disturbed bird-watchers and ornithologists and has been taken note of by the Governor, Miss Maidu, who is chairman of a consultative committee for allied problems. Her committee is now studying whether men and birds can co-exist to their mutual advantage.

A plea for a bird sanctuary in the Salt Lakes area is made by Mr. Biswamoy Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta. He says that birds, apart from being interesting from the academic and aesthetic points of view, also play an important role in man's economy by preying upon large hoards of insects which destroy crops and plantations, and carry diseases.

Bird Habitat. The Salt Lakes, now much reduced in area, cover

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Wagtails, swallows, ducks, snipes, plovers, sandpipers and others all flee their natural habitats during the day when it turns into a favourite hunting ground for bird hunters from Calcutta. Not protected by the West Bengal Wild Life Preservation Act, they are completely at the mercy of the pleasure-seekers whose wanton depredations continue throughout the year.

The precarious and pitiable existence of these winged animals has disturbed bird-watchers and ornithologists and has been taken note of by the Governor, Miss Waidu, who is chairman of a consultative committee for allied problems. Her committee is now studying whether men and birds can co-exist to their mutual advantage.

A plea for a bird sanctuary in the Salt Lakes area is made by Mr. Biswamoy Biswas of the Zoological Survey of India, Calcutta. He says that birds, apart from being interesting from the academic and aesthetic points of view, also play an important role in man's economy by preying upon large hoards of insects which destroy crops and plantations, and carry diseases.

Bird Habitat. The Salt Lakes, now much reduced in area, cover



In early April the Magpie Robin was easily the most eye-catching bird. Its song in the morning indicated that a territory has been acquired and a few days ago I found the female carrying nesting material under the Mangalore tile roof of our house. The male does not help at all with the building, but accompanies the female back and forth on her material carrying trips to ensure that she is doing her job. But the bird which has really won our hearts this season is the Whitespotted Fantail Flycatcher a pair (I am almost certain the progeny of the bird which nested in our garden last year) built a nest in a shrub just three feet from the ground. This was in early April. I am afraid we watched the birds too intently at their nest making, so they abandoned the site and started to build at the identical spot on a white Ixora shrub where the parents had built last year. Two eggs were laid and incubation commenced, but after two or three days a garden lizard presumably, devoured the eggs. The birds built a third nest on a Quisqualis creeper and we watched them at work for a couple of hours on the first day. Curiously, no progress was made on the subsequent days and we suspected that the reason was a prowling bloodsucker lizard on the creeper which perhaps made the birds realize that further efforts would be doomed to failure. I drove away the predator and was delighted to find after a week that the birds re-started to build at another place on the Quisqualis just a few feet away from where the previous nest was intended to be. This morning (19th May) I had the pleasure of seeing the first chick and the second egg will perhaps hatch tomorrow.

Postscript. May 23rd: I was out of Bombay from the 20th evening till the evening of the 22nd. When I returned the nest was empty. I am sure the indefatigable couple will build again.

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SALT LAKES AS BIRD SANCTUARY : LAND RECLAMATION  
AND HUNTERS WREAK HAVOC  
(With a map)

(Reproduced from Statesman, Calcutta)

By Special Representative of the  
Statesman in Eastern India

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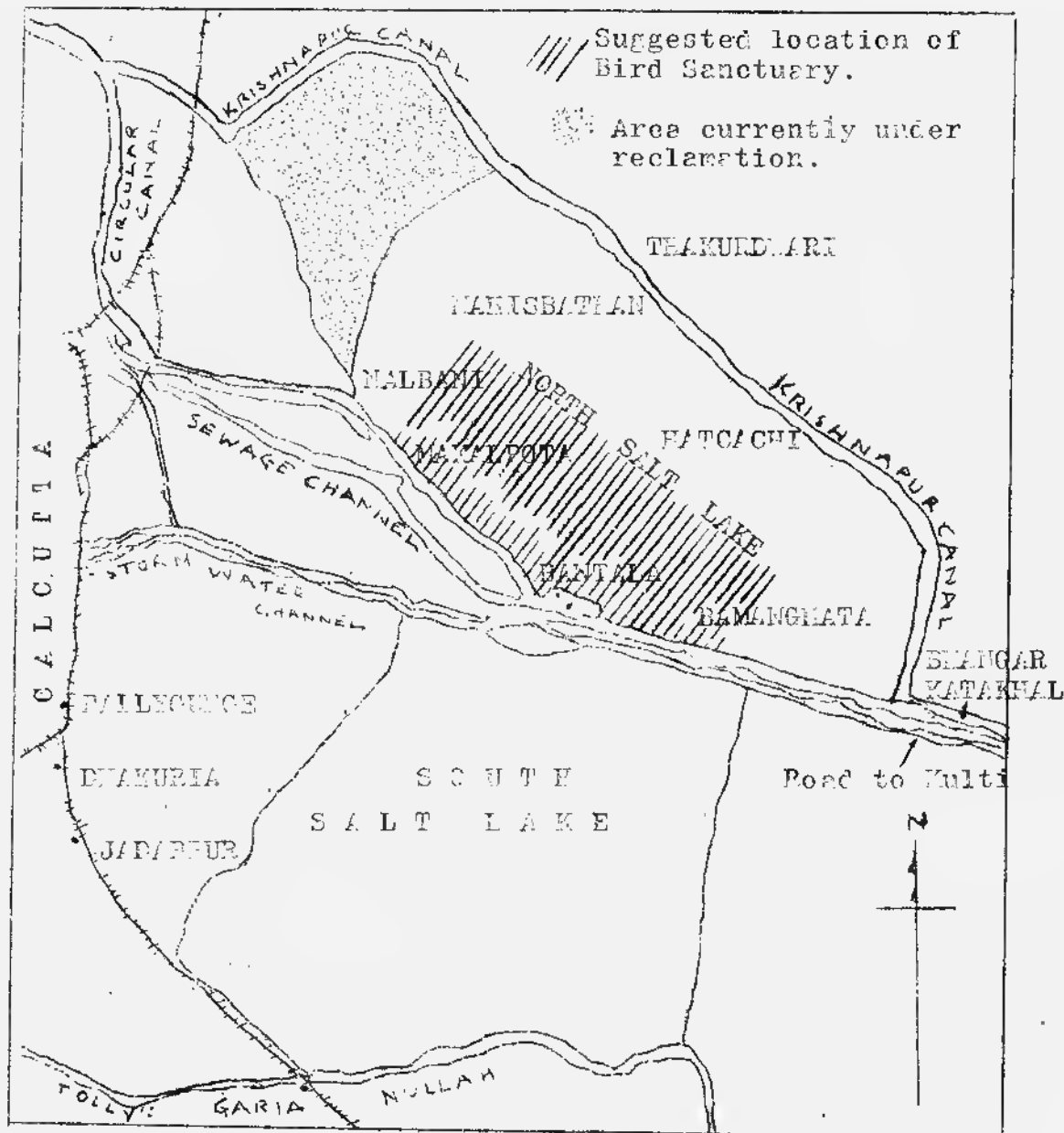
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Bird Habitat. The Salt Lakes, now much reduced in area, cover about 38 square miles of swamp, most of which are used as fish-

eries by private owners. With their extensive reed-beds and other aquatic vegetation, the area provides an excellent habitat for a large variety of aquatic and marsh birds, and a feeding ground for many others. About 200 different kinds of birds have been recorded in this area which has been a paradise for bird-lovers for well over a century.



The sketch map of the Salt Lakes and the surrounding area showing the suggested location of the bird sanctuary

The past few years' difficult foreign exchange position has proved a blessing to the birds. Restrictions on imports of cartridges and their high price have considerably limited the activity of bird-killers. This has apparently caused some improvement in the bird population of the Salt Lakes. The Cotton Teal, which became exceedingly scarce in this area between 1950 and 1955, can now again be seen in fair numbers, sometimes in flocks of even half a dozen or so.

Unfortunately, the programme to reclaim the Salt Lakes has posed a serious threat to the flourishing bird life in these marshes with its consequent likely increase of the insect menace. Any programme to reclaim new areas can hardly afford to ignore this aspect of the balance of nature. There were many instances in the last two or three centuries when serious changes in natural ecological conditions by man in many areas proved to be a costly venture.

Judicious planning of the reclamation programme, taking into



consideration the biological aspects, can effectively conserve animal resources without, hindering the project. All that is necessary is to set apart a patch of a few square miles in the Salt Lakes undisturbed, as a sanctuary for birds. A wide emabank-ment may be constructed to enclose the sanctuary and it should be lined with trees and bushes. The natural aquatic vegetation and planted trees will suffice to encourage and attract birds to live and roost there, if there are no trigger-happy marauders around to make them feel unsafe. Strict vigilance and deterrent punitive measures, if seriously applied, can take care of this aspect. Birds are generally very confiding creatures. They soon learn when and where they are given protection and are not molested, and in such areas they come very close to man.

A five-square-mile plot, covering the southern half of the North Salt Lake from Makalpota to Bamanghata can be turned into a bird sanctuary. A number of narrow embankments through the sanctuary will facilitate close-range observation by bird-watchers and ornithologists.

If thought desirable, a small fee may be levied for entry into the sanctuary. Many foreign bird-lovers and ornithologists who visit Calcutta as tourists, are very keen on seeing Indian birds. At present, they have to be satisfied with the few they see in the city or in its vicinity, or have to go to far-off places like the Ghana Sanctuary in Rajasthan.

The extension of the West Bengal Wild Life Preservation Act, 1959, to the area, stimulation of people's interest in wild life, and employment of the staff necessary for the strict enforcement of the Act, may all be taken up together to make the area an effective bird sanctuary.

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#### ARRIVAL AND DEPARTURE OF THE PIED CRESTED CUCKOO

By

S.D. Jayakar

Genetics and Biometry Laboratory  
Bhubaneswar, Orissa

In response to Mr. E.W. Ramble's appeal for information regarding dates of arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo in different parts of India in the May Newsletter I give below the relevant data for the years 1963-65 in the vicinity of Bhubaneswar.

|      | <u>Arrival</u> | <u>Departure</u> |
|------|----------------|------------------|
| 1963 | June 3         | September 17     |
| 1964 | May 20         | October 15       |
| 1965 | May 31         | October 23       |

These are dates when the pied crested cuckoo was seen or heard for the first and last times during the year.

In 1964 there was no record of the species between September 17 and October 15 and in 1965 between September 19 and October 23, and this seems to support Mr. Ramble's statement that though most birds leave by September a few stay on till well into October.

In 1963 and 1965, the dates of arrival near Bhubaneswar and in Shaharanpur are almost the same, whereas in 1964, there is a gap of 23 days, and this makes things still curiouser.

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I hope Mr. Ramble gets many replies to his appeal and that more such data on other species are contributed to the Newsletter.

Postscript. This year the Pied Crested Cuckoo was heard near Bhubaneswar on 19th of May.

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

R.A.S. Melliush says in his article published in this issue that a storm is a good time to be on the beach to look out for birds tossed out of their course by the wind. It is interesting to record that a Short-tailed Tropic Bird was found dead on the beach at Kihim, 15 miles south of Bombay, during May. There had been some inclement weather during that period, but whether this was the cause of the presence of this unusual bird in this area is difficult to tell.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Bird news from Madras

We are living on the sea shore here in a casuarina plantation. Every morning it is impossible to sleep after 5.30 as there is a group of about 15 Hill Mynas which make so much noise that we have to get up. This has been disbelieved by experts like Mr. M. Krishnan but even a birdwatcher on his first day of birdwatching cannot make a mistake when so many birds are hardly 10 yards away. There are also Common Mynas for comparison by sight and sound.

The other noisy birds here are Whitebrowed Bulbuls, Bluetailed Bee-eaters, and Ioras. Actually the morning chorus is a racket when Drongos, Whitebreasted Kingfishers, and Goldenbacked Woodpeckers join in.

S.V. Nilakanta

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##### Weaver-birds nesting on telegraph wires

While travelling towards Attur, in Salem District, on Tuesday, the 3rd of May, I had the opportunity to see a group of weaverbirds Ploceus philippinus? engaged in nest building, with nests suspended from telegraph wires. The nests were in various stages of construction. The site was at a point about 50 feet away from Salem-Cuddalore road and over crops of paddy. Water is available in the many wells, but there are few trees in this area, as every bit of cultivable land has been used up for crops like maize, sugarcane, and tapioca.

As the observation was made from a bus which had temporarily slowed down, I could not collect more details. Nevertheless, I have no doubt about the identity of the nests and the builders. Even though I had covered some fifty more miles on bus in Attur taluk, I did not come across any other weaver nests on telegraph wires.

Shri Badshah wrote about weaverbirds nesting on telegraph wires, in an article in the Madras Mail (1964). Shri A.R.K. Das has also observed this (personal communication). This is the first time I have observed this, and to my mind, illustrates the

ecological tolerance of the weaverbirds.

Daniel Mathew

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Night Herons breeding at Ernakulam, Kerala

With reference to Sri N.G. Pillai's article about the occurrence and breeding of Night Herons at Ernakulam in the Newsletter Vol. 6, No. 4, and his remarks that these birds are rare in Kerala, I have to state that my son T. Balakrishnan in his notes (in Vol. 5, No. 9, Newsletter) on the breeding of the Little Egret in Kerala has mentioned the fact of a big colony of Night and Pond Herons breeding in tamarind, peepal, and mango trees at Melamuri in the heart of Palghat town. Considering the numbers of Night Herons breeding at Palghat my son is of the opinion that the Night Heron is not now a rare bird in Kerala, and that by careful observation a few more such roosts and breeding colonies may be found.

May I further add that Sri N.G. Pillai's translation of 'pakalunnan' as 'day-time diner' doesn't seem to be appropriate to the very name of Night Heron, a habitual night-feeder. The word 'pakalunnan' should therefore be translated or interpreted to mean 'day time non-diner or abstainer'.

A few of these birds have established their roosts and are regularly breeding in some very large and shady tamarind trees in the heart of Coimbatore town. I have seen them breeding, in company with Pond Herons, in babul trees standing in tanks. Their breeding season is July and August, both at Palghat and Coimbatore.

B. Subbiah Pillay  
(Communicated by Prof. K.K. Naclakar)

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Zafar Futehally  
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# NEWS LETTER FOR BIRD WATCHERS

Volume 6-No 7 - July 1966



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## A BIRDHOUSE NEST

By

Nandan Nilakanta

Some years ago, the Club, through the Newsletter, had asked members to make a study of sparrows. In connection with this we had built a small nest-box, about six inches cubed, made of cement-asbestos board, with a hole of two inches diameter in one side to serve as an entrance. This contraption which was obviously man-made, was fixed to the fork of a drumstick tree by tying it with wire. It was 16½ feet (4.92 metres) off the ground and it was hoped that sparrows would nest in it. However, probably because crows and squirrels could get at it, it was not used for several years.

The rain and the continuous salt wind from the sea took their toll and the birdhouse began to disintegrate. The bottom of the house fell down and lodged in the fork. We paid little heed to it until one early June morning.

At about noon on 2nd June, 1966, My father and I were casually watching a pair of Magpie Robins that boldly include our garden in their territory. We are interested in these birds because one of them has been ringed by us. However, on this particular day, I noticed that the female had an insect in her bill and then lost interest till my mother suddenly remarked: 'Oh! It's gone into the ... no! It's gone behind the birdhouse!' This aroused our interest and Father saw it disappear into the birdhouse. A closer

look showed that the birds had built a nest over the fallen bottom. We examined it with a pair of binoculars but saw nothing of interest. A few days before I had seen the male Magpie Robin dive at a crow and chase it away from the very same tree but it never occurred to me that it might have a nest there.

The fact that the female entered the nest with an insect makes me believe that there are nestlings in the box. My only worry is that a Crow-Pheasant which has been skulking in our garden may find the nest. We were worried that this had happened when, on the morning of the 4th, we found that the birds seemed to take no interest in the nest. For very long they did not approach it and we even saw the male Magpie Robin eat an insect quite close to the nest-box, with no regard for it. Father climbed the tree to investigate but could neither find nor hear anything even when he put his finger into the nest. However, a short while later, the female entered the box with an insect. I watched the entrance carefully but it had not reappeared when I left ten minutes later.

Once on the previous day, the male bird entered the nest through the hole. A few minutes later the female came with an insect. It flew to the rim of the entrance hole but hastily hopped out again, for, with the male still inside there was probably not room enough. This episode convinces me that both the male and the female look after the young.

I have noticed that before a parent Magpie Robin enters the birdhouse it goes through an elaborate safety 'check-list'. It first perches on a branch about three feet from the nest and above it. Then, if there is nothing to alarm it, it hops onto another branch about a couple of feet below the nest and waits to make sure that there is no danger before it flies to the sill of the entrance hole. If it thinks that we are observing it, it flies into the opposite compound. They always use the entrance hole.

As they invariably perch at exactly the same spots, on the same branches, during the approach ritual, it should not be too difficult to photograph them by remote control. We also want to ring the young birds.

(This pair of Magpie Robins have been seen in our garden for many years. The male was netted on 20th November 1965 and its wing was found to be 90 mm. A blue, aluminium band was put around its left leg on that day by which it has been confirmed that these are the same birds that have been in our garden for so many years. They sing beautifully: whistling tunes and also chirring noises. The chirrrr, chirrrr sound seems to be a sort of alarm call or a warning signal, for, though it is not conclusively certain, I have observed that this sound is made whenever cats, crows or humans venture too close. Although I have often heard and seen the male make this chirring sound I have not ever seen the female doing so. I wonder if only the male can do so. Both the male and the female often sing lustily.)

Note. The cover picture shows the broken nest box with occupant.

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# BIRDWATCHING IN MUSSOORIE

By

N.M. Histry

Recently I spent eight enjoyable days in Mussoorie and the adjoining area and I used this opportunity to observe the birds in this region. On my first morning in Mussoorie I went for a stroll to the Gun Hill. Here I came across a small flock of Rufousbellied Babblers. They were jumping from one rock to another and hiding in the tall grass and bushes which grow in between the rocks. It was evident that they did not like the early morning intruder in their territory and they tittered harshly as they kept a close watch on my progress. On my way back from the Gun Hill I made a detour by the Caneel's Back road. Here when passing through an area in which there was thick foliage on either side of the road I heard what sound like a Tickell's Flowerpecker. The Flowerpecker was on the valley side and I was waiting for it to make its appearance, when a sky blue ball flew over my head from the hillside and settled on a rock just a few feet below me. I completely forgot the Flowerpecker and stood marvelling at the beauty of my new friend -- a Verditer Flycatcher. It was a splendid male specimen, just the size of a sparrow and it showed not the least sign of alarm at my presence. He just sat there on the rock and looked me all over. It almost seemed as if he was waiting for me to throw a crumb at him. Then he suddenly flew away out of sight and I continued on my way.

Next day, I strolled down the ghat into the Doon Valley. In the orchards, lychees were hanging in ripe red bunches from the trees and the birds must have been finding them irresistible, for in almost every tree-top a 'scarecrow' had been put up. I saw hoopoes, mynas, robins, magpie robins, jungle babblers, parakeets, bulbuls, black drongs and other common birds. Then I saw a solitary Rufousbacked Shrike. This bird was not difficult to recognize because of the conspicuous black band through the eyes and the rufous back. It was sitting in a tree by the roadside and when I approached it flew away to a more distant tree from where it kept a sharp eye on me. I went nearer and again it flew away. Finally, I gave up the chase. Nearby a pair of hoopoes were feeding on the ground in the shade of a tree. They started playing the same game with me as the shrike and flew from the shade of one tree to the next as I walked on. However, they were not so shy as the shrike and finally, they let me pass very close to them while they waited in the shade of a huge banyan tree. A little further on there was a water tap and a magpie robin was quenching its thirst in the small pool that had formed below the tap. It was very warm and both I and the magpie robin were equally thirsty. When I approached the tap the magpie robin retreated just a yard or so and then when I moved away it hopped back to have its fill.

A couple of days later I started on a trek from Mussoorie to Tehri. An early morning in a Himalayan jungle is an unforgettable experience, especially to a birdwatcher. The jungle was alive with the cooing of doves screeching of junglefowls and the calls and whistles of numerous other birds. Leading the orchestra was the acc mimic of the forests, the racket-tailed drongo, who regaled the jungles with his varied calls and songs. I identified two species of doves -- the Spotted Dove and the Ring Dove. About ten minutes after I had entered the forest I heard a commotion a little to my right on the hillside. Expecting to see some wild animals I peered intently through the undergrowth. To my pleasant surprise I saw two Red Junglefowls scratching the jungle floor and fighting it out over some juicy worm. However, they quickly took alarm at my presence and vanished in the undergrowth. A little further on, a junglefowl rushed across the road a few yards ahead

of me, in great panic. I discovered the cause of its panic as two villagers armed with sticks who were coming round a corner from the opposite direction. There was one bird whose call was very much to be heard in the jungle, but which I could neither see nor identify. I had heard the same bird in the Kulu Valley the previous year and I think it is a regular visitor to the Himalayan foothills every summer. It has a very pleasant call consisting of just two notes, which it repeats regularly at short intervals. The notes sound something like koo-kuk, as if somebody is playing the notes E-C on a descending scale - can it be a Pigmy Owllet? Perhaps some reader may be able to identify the bird although I realize that the data supplied by me is very insufficient for proper identification. When I was nearing Kaudia, the tranquility of the forest was shattered by the sharp report of a rifle shot. It was a pitiable reminder of the junglefowl's panic.

The track emerged from the forest near a village called Kapul Pani and there there was a steep descent to Tehri along a track which clung to the rockwall on one side and hugged the valley on the other. There were huge lizards and chameleons in the holes and crevices in the rockface on the left. A brahminy kite circled in the sky over the valley on the right.

I was a little surprised to see this bird here but then a little down the hill slope there were terraced fields and down into the valley were water-logged paddy fields. Possibly the kite had strayed up to this height away from the water, to hunt lizards in the rocks. In the terraced fields I saw the somewhat rare whitechecked bulbuls. Unlike their more commonly seen counterparts the redwhiskered and redvented bulbuls, the whitechecked bulbuls have a yellow vent instead of a red one. I also saw some more rufousbacked shrikes and now and then a Kashmir Roller (blue jay) which looked majestic in flight. Near the village of Ram Gaon I saw a splendid specimen (male) of a crested bunting. Surprisingly it made no sign of flying away even when I approached very close. Then a thunderstorm with lightening flashes broke out over the Tehri Garhwal hills and it brought my birdwatching to an abrupt end.

On my last day in Mussoorie I once again went to Gun Hill in the morning and took a stroll to Savoy in the evening. I was rewarded with the sight of two uncommon birds that day -- a kestrel nesting in a tall tree on the approach to the Gun Hill, and some scarlet minivets in a cluster of trees near the Savoy.

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### THE STORY OF 'KOTUR'

By T.V. Jose

On 14th April 1964, my neighbour's son came running to me and said that there was a nest of a bird in the near-by Pongom tree. From the details of the nest and the bird he described, it was plain that the bird was a coppersmith (Megalaima haemacephala).

#### The nest and the nesting

I found the stump 20 ft. above the ground slightly turned upward showing a dark depression on the upper side at the jagged end, which turned out to be the mouth of the hole. The hole at its mouth measured 2 ins. across and was 6 inches in depth. That the hole should be thus open to the sky seem to me an unusual occurrence, as always observed coppersmith birds choose to excavate nest holes from the lower side of a dead branch or the side of the vertical or slanting stem.

As I approached the chick -- the only one left in the hole -- it sensed danger and instantly lay flat close to the wood motionless. It was dark-greyish in colour with incipient feather buds bordering

the wings; otherwise, it appeared naked and blind too. As soon as I put my fingers into the hole in an attempt to catch it, it withdrew to the bottom. However, I could take it out though with some difficulty.

There was no lining of cotton or any soft material used to pad the nest. The bottom of the nest was covered with the chick's almost-amber-coloured droppings. Yet the accumulated excreta did not stink. In general features the hole of a coppersmith bears a striking resemblance to that of the small green barbet (*Megalaima viridis*). I do not however remember whether the piled up faeces in the latter case were odorous or odourless as I came across one nest some years back. One thing seemed pretty sure that what might seem to be unhygienic has evidently little to do with the health of the chicks in either case. Chicks are always spotlessly clean, and healthy.

Threatened, as it was, by its natural enemies on the one hand, for the tree had harboured many sinister-looking crow-nests, and neighbours' children on the other, I thought the chick would be safer under my care. My overwhelming desire to study the chick's growth and behaviour, was another tempting reason to kidnap it from its lawful parents. In our room I kept it on our table in a soft pad of cotton cloth, between two rows of books.

#### Life under our roof

With apparent ease the young coppersmith adapted itself to the new surroundings. On calling it, 'kotur' it would open its beak and attempt to grab the food held out to it. Seemingly, it was unable to judge the direction of food for in the nest the direction was restricted always to the open side. With the food safely in its mouth, the clamour and fuss it made at each time would fade out. Kotur's diet generally consisted of ripe plantain, grapes (peeling off skin), figs and chikku. Except for the meagre quantity of insect food that it might have got through fruits like those of banyan and peepul, provided occasionally, there was no insect food as such in its menu, since we did not know what sort of insects it would eat. Deficiency of nitrogenous food, I am afraid, had an adverse effect on its overall growth and particularly on the growth of feathers. We gave it food in small quantities, fearing indigestion. When none of us was at home, the young bird had to starve. Nevertheless, after my coming from office I used to make up the shortage by feeding it till as late as 10.30 at night.

#### Some significant activities

At this time one surprising fact came to my notice: that nature has failed to provide any marked colour in the mouth of the chick, as might be seen among a variety of birds, of which the purpose may be to help their parents to feed their offspring rightly and evenly in the confusing colour of the nest and nestlings. After a moment's thought I realized the futility of any colour, however bright, except possibly white, where the chicks have to live in dark holes.

When a meal was over not only did its agitation die out but the chick crawled quickly backward and lay flat for some time. We all know that a backward movement, whether among birds or other animals, is very uncommon and perhaps even unnatural. To understand then this peculiar habit we have to go a little deep into the house-hold life of coppersmiths.

The depth of their nests varies from 5 to 7 inches, or a little more. Variation I think depends on the texture of the wood they choose for boring. In one nest, selected at random, the inside space somewhere in the centre, measured roughly  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter (vertical section) and mouth of the hole  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. The hindmost

portion of the tunnel is invariably used for depositing their droppings. The remaining portion is very much limited considering the area required by the number of chicks, usually three and rarely four, that have to live till they are full grown. Chicks of different sizes are found in a clutch. So, at feeding time, all of them cannot thrust their head and neck equally well and catch the attention of their parents to receive food. As soon as one succeeds in satisfying itself with the food offered to it, it would recede allowing the other to have its turn and the parent bird thus completes the round with no feeling of confusion, over-feeding or underfeeding. This arrangement thus helps to feed the chicks impartially from the youngest to the eldest, with the care and attention proper to them. I surmise therefore the lack of distinct colour in the younglings' mouth can be interpreted meaningfully in this context only.

Another occasion at which it would likewise crawl backward was when it wanted to evacuate its bowel. This is in order to deposit the excreta at the rear-most corner of the cavity.

As days passed we observed that the bird was capable of producing two types of sound. One was just diminutive of its adult stage from which it earned its name, Coppersmith, and heard it producing during the interval between one meal and the other calling for our attention; and the other, described roughly, was much like a faint hissing noise emitted by a hot nail dipped in cold water, a sign of satisfaction, heard only after every meal, but lost its identity when it grew into a fledgeling.

Unless it felt hungry, it would drowse most of the time. However, it was not without activities of its own when it was awake. At times soon after food taking it would run the tongue inside the beak over and over. Sometimes, as if it was dreaming or imagining the proximity of food, it would open its mouth, thrust forward head and neck and 'eat air'. This mock food taking was repeated so often and earnestly that one might think that the chick was speaking to itself (mentally): 'I will eat thus and thus, let the food come within my reach.' Sometimes I fancied it was taking planned exercise to improve the related muscles of head and neck to snatch the food next time more efficiently. Fancy apart, could that have been due to some ~~in~~ minor disorder of the digestive system caused by our faulty feeding as, for example, hiccup in humans?

Flight of Psychodas (a kind of tiny flies found on fruits) too near the chick, would sometimes tempt the chick to chase them. But never have I seen it catching any.

For some time I observed that sudden sounds make the chick instinctively silent and crouch flat on the table. But in course of time, when the chick was accustomed with disturbances of the room, it grew indifferent to such signs that otherwise called for caution. If, therefore, we want to see the life-saving instincts of the chicks well preserved and sharp enough to become of any use in later life, they should be reared, as far as possible, in secluded places, away from the hubbub of our life.

#### Further developments

On the 19th I was satisfied to see the feather stalks elongated, even their olive green tops sprouted, but not sufficiently long and spread out to cover the body completely. To my delight the day

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<sup>1</sup>E.C. Stuart Baker says in his book THE NIDIFICATION OF BIRDS OF THE INDIAN EMPIRE that three eggs are generally laid, sometimes only two and rarely four.

<sup>2</sup>This means incubation begins as soon as the first egg is laid.

day before, I saw it preening its scanty feather buds or making attempts to do so. It was learning an important lesson in personal hygiene. Now its eyes were fully open, and what was more, its eye-sight was improving day by day. Coppersmith chicks have poor eye-sight as compared with bulbul chicks, or perhaps, for that matter, any chicks of open nests. At this time, or a little earlier, came stretching exercises. Now and then it would stretch out one of its wings and the leg of that side to the extent it could. Yet another activity of far more importance was its training of wing muscles for the oncoming flight. It would lower its front portion close to the wooden plank of the table to get a grip over it and stretch out both wings and vibrate briskly. In spite of all these activities, the little one had not full control over its muscles, and, as a result, it faltered in attempts requiring skill and attention. Flapping exercises continued until at last it became a full fledged flier. How does it manage all these various activities requiring considerable space in its narrow tunnel nest?

On the 20th I cleaned its beak, cheek, brow and throat with tip of damp towel. I noticed that Kotur could straighten its knees letting the weight of its body fall on its feet. In the days that followed it learnt to hop and by and by it would hop all over the table, sometimes going into narrow spaces between rows of books that somewhat resembled its nest hole. And what was once hopping now turned to short flight. On 28th, Kotur flew a distance of about 7 ft. without stopping. It was a horizontal flight. Its flights, in this as in those that followed immediately, were aimless. They were attempts to the unknown, but repeated with verve and vigour. The thrill of new experience robbed its desire for food as its food taking in those days was found unusually irregular and far reduced. The kok, kok (not tonk, tonk; the difference between the sound of the chick and that of the parents (adults) to my ear mainly lies in the shallowness and quicker repetition of the form) noise was also very much reduced. In short, all its attention now seemed to have converged to the one task of flight.

On our shelf I fixed a dead branch with many tiny twigs. This gave opportunity to the bird to learn gripping, hopping and aiming at one twig from the other. Kotur learnt quickly ascending and horizontal flights, but seemed unable for a time to fly downward. But by the 3rd May it could come down from the branch to the table to eat without our help. And on 5th, a Saturday, it directly flew down on the head of my brother asking for food.

Ever since Kotur was able to fly it preferred to roost on the branch of tree we fixed on the shelf. This shows, that coppersmiths can sleep on branches too, like any other birds.

However, I was eager to test the truth of the statement that Coppersmiths use their nest hole as a roost even after their parental duties are over for the year. On several nights I wriggled up the tree to examine the nest hole where Kotur's parents were supposed to roost. But always I found it empty, and unused.

I hasten to add that the finding is not sufficient to prove anything contrary to the observation made on this point by others. One of the studies I carried out later proved that Coppersmiths do roost in their nest holes, as well as on twigs. In one case both the parents spent nights in one hole with their chick or chicks in that nest. But much is yet to be known about their roosting habits and I hope my efforts in this direction will soon be rewarded.

(To be continued)

# THE ARRIVAL OF THE GOLDEN ORIOLE IN SAHARANPUR, U.P

By

E. W. Ramble

Here, in Saharanpur, the Golden Oriole is a local migrant and its arrival dates are given below:

|      |   |          |      |   |          |
|------|---|----------|------|---|----------|
| 1947 | : | 27 March | 1953 | : | 4 April  |
| 1948 | : | 1 April  | 1964 | : | 5 April  |
| 1949 | : | 9 April  | 1965 | : | 12 April |
| 1950 | : | 2 April  | 1966 | : | 8 April  |

They leave again during September. On my last home leave in the U.K. I visited the Booth Museum of British Birds at Brighton a couple of times with my little son. The exhibits, which have all been taken in the British Isles, are attractively laid out in natural 'nesting' settings and the Museum is well worth a visit. I was surprised to see a pair of Golden Orioles (no nest) there, and in conversation with the Curator was informed that there are generally one or two sightings reported by birdwatchers in the south of England every summer.

## The Blackheaded Oriole

Curiously enough the Blackheaded Oriole does not visit Saharanpur. When I was stationed at Monghyr (Bihar) between 1954-1962 the opposite was the case, the Blackheaded Oriole being common and the Golden Oriole did not seem to be a visitor.

One year a Blackheaded Oriole chick was found under a banyan tree in our very large garden. We never located the nest nor found a second chick. The parent birds were considerably agitated; the chick had barely a covering of feathers and could not even stand up. As a temporary measure my wife put it into a small wicker cage and hung it under the banyan tree. You can imagine our delight and surprise to find that the parent birds began to feed it through the cage slats. Time passed, the cage was taken indoors at nights and hung under the tree during the day. Marauders such as crows and tirumtees were viciously attacked by the parents. The chick flourished and grew into a handsome youngster. The problem next was to release the bird. Obviously, with no strength in its wings, it would fall an immediate victim to the crows or merlins. At that time I maintained a large outdoor aviary about 20 ft. x 10 ft. x 8 ft. high in which I kept a variety of grain eating birds only. This aviary was at the back of the house while the banyan tree was in the front.

However, we released the young oriole into the aviary. To our great pleasure the parents soon located it and continued to feed it through the wire netting. In a week the youngster was flying about inside the aviary and a few days later we released it.

The last we saw of it was high up in a tree with the parent birds

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A NOTE ON Otus scops

By

Robert L. Fleming, Ph.D.

About twenty years ago I heard a small owl calling at dusk. I did not recognize it. 'Pluck-pak-pluck' it would repeat over and over again. Barlowganj, Mussoorie, U.P., where I heard it, is about 5000 feet in altitude and is surrounded by steep, rocky slopes dotted with bahunia trees.

In Nepal, fifteen years later, I again heard this bird in the Rapti Dun near the Narayani River. The altitude was about 1000 feet and the forest was largely sal. It was well after dark when the monotonous sound began and though I could locate the very tree, the flashlight revealed no bird.

It was in Jhapa District, the extreme south-eastern district of Nepal terai, that we camped in January, 1965. Here again, several individuals of this illusive bird, punctuated the night air. Stumbling over logs in a cut-over forest I finally glimpsed a small owl sitting on a stump in an open glade of light forest. It flew into tall trees near-by and again I could not find it. I counted 247 'pluck-pak-plucks' before it stopped.

Three weeks later we camped in the foothills on the border of Jhapa and Ilam districts, in a heavy, mixed forest at 800 feet. Again our little friend began to sound off, this time a half hour before dusk. Our son, R.L. Fleming II soon returned with a beautiful bright reddish-tan phased Otus scops. This was now a familiar sound throughout the terai and into the Nepalese foothills to about 3500 feet. We were in Kanchanpur two months later; this is the extreme south-western district of the terai. Here, across the Sarda River from Tanakpur, we collected a specimen in broad day light. It was silent but flew out of a leafy tree in front of us into a similar tree near-by.

It had taken so many years to know that 'pluck-pak-pluck' were the notes of the North Indian Scops Owl!

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## UNEXPECTED BIRD

By

Lalsinh M. Raol

I was out for birdwatching in the evening on 18.3.61. There is a very good spot for waterbirds, especially waders at Rajkot in the river Aji where the city sewage water flows, a little downstream behind the Central Jail. There is also another small stream of dirty sewage water in front of the Central Jail. After a little meandering it flows into the Aji. Just where it takes a turn to the last, a group of three birds attracted my attention. Though I had never seen those birds before, I could at once identify them. They were Pied Mynas. To make sure I wrote down the description of the birds, later to compare it with the book. On referring to Whistler I found that I was correct in my identification. I was very much surprised to find Pied Mynas in Rajkot as that bird is not mentioned by R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji in his BIRDS OF SAURASHTRA. Thus my sighting the bird on 18.3.61 may perhaps be the first record of that bird from Saurashtra. The Pied Mynas were

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Recently I was lucky enough to come across the Pied Myna again. While taking a stroll in the Darbar Baug at Jasdan on 18.4.66 at about 6.45 p.m., I saw a solitary Pied Myna. It caught my eye when it flew from the ground into a nearby tree. Then it alighted to take a bath from the running water of a small water course. I did not see it again.

Y.S. Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan is a well-known and keen birdwatcher. On my informing him about the occurrence of the Pied Myna in his own estate, he told me that he had never seen it in Jasdan.

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#### REVIEW

COMMON TREES. By Dr. H. Santapau. pp. 138. National Book Trust. Price Rs8.25

We Indians, (readers of the Newsletter excepted) generally know very little about our own trees and plants. Part of the reason for this is that there is no one to tell us, and that most books on the subject are expensive. The paper bound edition of Fr. Santapau's book costs only Rs5.25 -- and for this paltry sum the interested layman will have the privilege of learning, from one of our best-known authorities, the characteristics of thirty-six of the commoner trees of our country. Fr. Santapau's easy informal manner of writing makes it a pleasure to read his book. The twenty-nine line illustrations of leaf and flower are accurate and pleasing, while there are twelve coloured plates. One could have wished for more, but considering the price, twelve is a generous number. We hope that the intentions of the National Book Trust will be realized and the book will indeed find its way into the hands of every 'intelligent layman' in India.

L.F.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### A Coppersmith's unusual food

While hopping about in a Gul Mohar tree (Dolonix regia) a Coppersmith chose to peck its red flower. Once it battered one of the petals that it plucked, but ultimately it let it fall. The other time it gulped a good piece of it and flew away. This happened on 25th May morning.

In the morning of 24th May 1966, I saw a common house crow bringing a piece of brown-bread to a puddle of water. It dipped the piece and moved to a place where the now softened bread it began to tear and gulp. When it found some part still hard it again soaked in the same water and finished it off.

Also I noticed that the water it chose to soak was the cleanest of all the puddles spread all over there.

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T.V. Jose

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##### Bird notes from Delhi

We had seen a pair of Lammergeier in May in Ranikhet but had failed to identify them as they did not appear to be the 4 feet in length that Whistler describes, and other visitors called them the Kumaon Golden Eagles. It was not till we were up there again in December and still trying to identify these 'golden' eagles that our ten year old daughter was fired by enthusiasm and insisted that they were Lammergeiers and we had to agree that except in size they filled the book's description and must be so.

We have not been out birdwatching so much this year as last as we have taken up sailing at the weekends, but even this sport gives one some wonderful views. The eagles are many round the river, but none of them look like Pallas's Fishing Eagles! We saw our first Avocets and Skimmers, and on a rough day we have sailed almost into swimming duck and teal before they have heard us.

Our house is not far from the Jamuna. The garden is small and mainly shrubs and inhabited largely by the three kinds of bulbuls, tailor birds, sunbirds and ashy wren warblers. Twice we saw Sirkeer Cuckoo (two years ago) but this year our only unusual visitors have been two Grey Hornbills (on two occasions), a Large Green Barbet, and a Sparrow Hawk which crashed to its death against our verandah glass door last November while chasing a Little Brown Dove (also a victim), who thought to escape into our house! I believe he is now stuffed and on display in the Bombay Natural History Museum.

A month or so ago, a pair of White-eye, with a minute baby in tow, hopped along into a bush where I was pruning. They were a delightful sight, but I never saw them again.

We are looking forward to seeing Peter Scott's film WILD WINGS about Slimbridge next week. The Zoological Study Circle is arranging it with the British Information Service, who have just received the film from London. It should be very interesting.

M.C. Robertson.

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#### Birdwatching in Khanewal, Pakistan:

I normally live in Khanewal (Pakistan). It is a great place for birds, however particularly in the spring and autumn seasons and one can see many Palearctic species in full breeding plumage in late April -- such as Grey Plover, Dunlin, Bartailed Godwits, Greater Mongolian Sand Plovers, Kentish Plovers (breeding) to mention but a few.

T.J. Roberts.

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#### Bird notes from Rawatbahata, Rajasthan:

Much of our astonishment, an osprey is staying in the neighbourhood and seen over the river every now and then. A cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) rather light grey in colour as compared to what we have seen in Seden was heard and seen (indeed at 10 ft. distance). I also believe I have heard a greenshank which I presume should be ruled out. 4 kinds of kingfishers both specimens of small minivets, pied crested cuckoo, paradise flycatchers and many more are on the list we are preparing.

S.O. Nilsson.

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Zafar Futehally  
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# NEWSLETTER

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-raj Kumar of Jasdan (p. 8 )

## REGULAR AND UNCOMMON VISITORS TO TAMBARAM

By

Gift Siromoney &amp; E. O. Shaw

In the October (1965) issue of the Newsletter Melliush recommended that "every birdwatcher in India should set about the study of the birds of a clearly defined area of the country, even if it was only his back garden". Most of the birds reported here are from our gardens and all of them seen in the campus of the Madras Christian College, which is situated about 25 km. south-west of Madras. The last report on Tambaram birds was made by one of us in the August issue of the Newsletter in 1963 covering about three years. This report covers the period since August 1963 even though almost all the interesting observations were made during the 1965-66 season.

For more than the past year a watch has been kept on the birds of the campus by some members of the staff. The chief interest has been to attempt to keep track of the changing numbers of certain migrant birds, or local migrants, and this is already revealing interesting patterns and variations in pattern. During the watch many other points of ornithological interest arise and here we would mention some which may be of general interest.

Flycatchers with one notable exception were scarce in 1966. The Brown Flycatcher usually a winter resident was only noted as passing through in 1966 mainly in March. The exception was the Bluethroated Flycatcher. This bird mentioned in Baker and Inlis as a very rare migrant found only one at St. Thomas Mount (though also recorded later at Tambaram and once by Shaw in 1954 at Chinglepet) turned up in numbers at Tambaram this year. The first specimens were seen by us in late November 1965. At that time some doubt existed as to its identity on account of the colouring. This was cleared up in correspondence with Mr. Lutchally. From then onwards frequent sightings were obtained and it was estimated that at least seven pairs were resident in the campus until the first week of March.

The male birds as seen here differed from the description in Baker and Inlis in having the whole head with neck and throat blue, this colour being cut

also from the bird seen in Chinglepet in 1954 in which case the neck was rusty and only the throat blue. The forehead was lighter brilliant azure blue. The female was olive-brown with the rust of the breast very light in colour.

The birds, particularly the male could be seen regularly at some six or seven points in the campus, all well wooded at the edge of paths. The pairs appeared to observe territorial rights strictly and did not stray from their particular areas.

They were easy to observe because they would respond to calls with great readiness and showed themselves much less suspicious or nervous of human beings than most flycatchers are. When Shaw one day spotted on flying out from thick jungle to an open stand of small trees he went to get binoculars to get a better view. This proved impossible for the bird persisted in sitting on twigs at too close range for the focus of the binoculars, and when disturbed from one so near would fly to another equally near on the other side. This was typical of their friendly and confident behaviour.

They were usually called up by imitations of their scolding note, a sharp frequently repeated Tss, tss, tss very commonly used by them immediately recognizable as it was considerably sharper in tone than the Blyth's Reed-Warbler's, which is also common in the undergrowth here in winter.

They would also respond to imitations of their song. This is normally a five-noted little song with the first three notes in descending order and then the fourth and fifth ascending. It reminds one of the Tickell's Flycatcher though ~~it is~~ perhaps more cheerful. To this song it would come out of thickly growing wood and by it the bird would make its presence known so that it could easily be found by any one familiar with the call. Occasionally when close to a bird it was possible to hear another little song. This was delivered so to speak *sotto voce*. It was a long succession of little trills, chirring noises and whistles, hardly audible yet just to be caught by a sharp ear and to be noted by the eye from the movements of the beak and the dilations of the throat. A song similar to this has been noted in the Brown Flycatcher.

Though mainly found of thickly wooded spots it did not remain in these but would visit more open stands of trees and would there usually be found on the lower branches. A female was once seen eating a small black berry (Zizyphus oenoplia) of the jujube family. It did not restrict itself in flycatching and frequently would fly down to pick off the ground a small beetle or, as once seen, an inch-long caterpillar. In this kind of behaviour it definitely resembled the chat family.

By the first week of March they had all departed. It would be interesting to find if evidences of this migration wave have been noted elsewhere, and what the pattern is in 1966-67.

The first record of the northern variety of the Orangeheaded Ground Thrush was made as early as 1938 by Mrs. Barnes but the southern variety was recorded only 25 years later. This year both varieties were seen together in more than the usual numbers.

In the garden these Ground Thrushes occupied the areas usually taken by the Pittas. The first arrival (Northern) was noted at the end of October and the last bird (Southern) was seen on March 23. The migratory northern variety with orange head with no other markings on the head whereas the southern variety, believed to be resident in the hills, has a white throat and two dark bands on the head. There seems to be some variation in the markings between the individuals. These birds afford an unusual example where two races of the same species can be easily distinguished in the field.

The Plaintive Cuckoos arrived in November as usual and could be seen till the middle of April. It was not unusual for these birds to come down to the ground to pick up caterpillars. Most of the individuals were dark grey in colour and only a few of them were chestnut. A good number of these cuckoos were noted in March and April and these must have been passing through from Ceylon. The Forest Wagtails which pass through Tambaram were seen on September 14, 1965, which is

or twos. For the first time in the last few years there were very few Paradise Flycatchers. A couple of them were seen in the jungle once in October and nothing till April. Those seen in April had only short tails. The Greyheaded Mynas were not numerous unlike the 1964-65 season.

We were able to add a few new species to our checklist. Since the starting of a farm in the campus, we found the grain-eating birds like the Munias and the Weaver birds in large numbers. We recorded for the first time the Whitebacked Munias in Nover (1965). The Short-toed Eagle and the Openbill Stork have been seen flying over the campus. Shaw saw a Grackle once in October (15.10.1964) which is the migratory season. A female Blackbird was seen by Siromoney at the end of January 1966 eating the Zizyphus oenoplia berries near the garden. It stayed in the garden for a couple of weeks. Going through the records it is found that a solitary bird was seen once on February 21, 1958 but no other appearance was noted till this year. A Grey Drongo was seen by Siromoney once (14.2.1965) sitting on the telephone wires very near the campus. It was easily identified by its bright crimson eyes and the lighter colour of the body. The Large Cuckoo-Shrike was seen after many years in March 1966 and a few pairs stayed for a week making their peculiar call which sounds like rubbing of branches together. An Indian Banded Bay Cuckoo was seen for the first time in Tambaram by Shaw.

A Banded Crake was spotted by Mrs. Siromoney in the garden in December (20.12.1965). It was usually seen after 4 p.m. and before 9 a.m. and could be heard at dusk in the scrub jungle nearby. It was quite bold and visited the bird bath regularly and picked up what it could from the kitchen drain water. It became such a familiar sight in the garden that the five-year-old Siromoney Jr. would often call our attention to its presence. It stayed till May 2 in the area usually occupied by the Whitebreasted Waterhen or sometimes the Pitta.

A Scops Owl has been seen in the campus but we are not sure of its identity. We hope to make a special effort to identify the Crested Larks which are seen in the dry areas. A bulbul-like bird seen only once has defied our attempts at identifying it and we are giving the description hoping that some reader may be able to identify it. The bird was seen by Siromoney, settling down to roost in a bush near the garden just before dark on November 16, 1965. It was of the size of a Whitebrowed Bulbul with the wholehead purplish blue but no other marking. The beak appeared to be black, legs blackish grey and wings rusty brown. The breast was of the same colour as the head but turning grey. The abdomen and the lower portion were white. The tail was long, longer than that of the chats and the usually flycatchers. When the wings were closed there was some white near the primaries. It was seen through the glasses from a distance of 20 ft., and later when it got dark a few feet from the bird. Now go ahead and solve the puzzle!

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## THE STONE CURLEW

By

E. W. Ramble

Few birdwatchers get the chance to observe the Stone Curlew in its nesting habits. Our Company has a large park-like area of 16 acres wherein there are four houses, separated by hedges. For many years a pair of Stone Curlews has made this area their headquarters, and although they disappear for long periods they are permanently resident between April and July and are occasionally resident at other times of the year for varying periods. They are our especial favourites.

A colleague of mine who lived in one of the houses ten years ago recently asked me if the Stone Curlews still nested in the garden. I have been here for five summers and each year they have nested twice. Is it possible that they are the identical pair and, if so, what could be the life span of the species?

The birds lay in the most exposed places. The nest is in the open.

depend entirely on the natural camouflage of the eggs blending into the ground area. Consequently the pair have not often been lucky with the hatch without destruction from snakes, monitor lizards, stray dogs, jackals, and above all the malis.

Last year my neighbour and I had been watching the eggs for a fortnight when one afternoon I returned for lunch to find the malis had been clearing the leaves and sweeping in the vicinity of the nest. I rushed over to find the eggs gone, none of the malis of course know anything about them, but after a considerable amount of abuse and dire threats one produced an egg from his shirt pocket, more abuse and second mali produced the other egg, but it was damaged. However, I replaced both eggs in the nest depression and although the whole area had been swept clean the birds returned later in the day. Next morning I found that they had ejected the damaged egg and I never found it. Two days later the first egg hatched.

The chick was moved into a nearby hedge a day later by the parents. We inspected it most evenings, handling it on several occasions to give it a good examination and in time the parents ceased to be agitated when we were around. 'Young Robert' as we christened him, grew into a fine bird.

This year we located the nest on the 9th March in a most ridiculously exposed position. The wheels of our car on the path passed within two feet of the eggs at least twice a day. Summoning all malis we told them what dire consequences there would be if the eggs were stolen. The chicks hatched on 28th March -- 19 days after we had located the eggs. They were covered with brownish down with three dark stripes down the back. They looked entirely helpless but by evening had been moved from the nest. It took me an hour of close searching before I located them under a peach tree 30 yards away so beautifully camouflaged among the dead leaves that it would have been impossible to find them except that one gave the faintest cheep at intervals.

Two days later they were moved a hundred yards to a hedge. Small as they were the characteristic of pressing themselves flat on the ground with the head and neck stretched out is remarkable.

I had to go away for a few days and on my return it took me four days to locate them again. They had shifted to one of the other compounds. I only found one chick, the other presumably had been taken by a kite. It had grown to four times its size since I last saw it, yet still retained its down and markings. It allowed itself to be picked up, i.e. they obviously depend on their natural camouflage for protection rather than their running powers. As it grew it got uglier, the head large and the huge yellow eyes were almost frightening.

This youngster survived and before long could fly and took his place with the parents in the garden.

I was keen to establish how long the eggs take to hatch and kept a sharp watch on the birds for the second clutch of the season. On 25th May I located the eggs and I knew that it could not have been more than a day or two before the second egg had been laid. I inspected them morning and evening for 24 days and was eagerly awaiting the hatch. Alas! I had neglected to warn the malis and on the 18th June evening I returned to find the eggs gone and tell signs of mali activity near the site. No amount of questioning could produce the eggs. I had not inspected them that morning as I had had a heavy night before and I was truly upset.

I had watched the eggs from 25th May to 18th June -- a period of 24-25 days. How long then do they normally take to hatch? Incidentally, only once have I actually caught the parent birds sitting on the eggs; usually one sits near the nest and the other some distance away. They are extremely clever at decoying you away from the nest. Our birds are so used to us, however, that they seldom move more than 10-15 yards away, when I do my daily inspection.

Allowing for a possible two days before location let us put it then that the eggs take between 24-28 days to hatch. Can any reader put it closer than that?

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By

T.V. Jose

(C o n t i n u e d)

We now took the bird outside the room to familiarize it with new surroundings. On the first day it made frantic little flights, and we soon took the bird back home. Such hazardous flights are natural at this phase of its life, and the parents can take care of them. But with wingless parents like us such flights may be dangerous.

During the following days, however, when we took it out again, Kotur would stray on from branch to branch and from tree to tree, or it would sit helplessly at one spot for quite a long time, as if not knowing what to do. Even our calls or the lure of food could not bring the bird down. Many times rather I had to climb the tree and give it food. Kotur had no sense of direction. Besides a number of crows had nested in the nearby trees and their noisy quarrels were reminders of the danger that our chick was then exposed to.

On the 13th the bird sat on the ground and sedately picked up grains of sand and gulped them down. Copper-smiths to my knowledge are purely arboreal and their getting down to replenish stock of sand in their gizzards is unknown. Even the need of sand seemed to me quite questionable in the case of copper-smiths as their food forms no hard part of the fruit which requires crushing and grinding, but the pulpy part and the stone they always evacuate through their faeces 'intact'. In these days I examined its stool and found at times stone grits in it. Some I even preserved. Was this phenomenon due to a deficiency of minerals in its diet?

In the search for insect food, we discovered the mango hopper (Idiocerus niveosparvus), a jassid, found in good numbers on the bark of a mango sapling, standing just near our room. This was all together an accidental discovery. Prior to this, a variety of insects was brought to it, including those we got from dead wood of different trees on which I had much hope since adult birds are often seen pecking at withered stumps that hold no prospect for nest building. Anyway, Mango-hoppers proved so palatable a dish that our chick was seldom tired of eating.

Though Kotur was alone, it was not an introvert. It had many antics and pranks which I would watch for hours. To begin with, it would go into the folds of canvas which was kept in the fork of the mango sapling, and peck about and when tired of doing this it would come out only to go into another fold, turn back and would peck again here and there and look out into the open. Similarly it would in its happy mood, perch on and play with the towel that went round my chest and shoulders.

In these days I noticed that the chick had a particular inclination towards red coloured things. One day it took a fancy to peck at a neighbour's ear rings studded with red stones. Another day when I found difficulty in cajoling the bird to come down I waved a piece of red coloured cloth and the chick immediately flew down to my hand. I tried this trick twice and both times it worked. If it can perceive red colour, besides white and black, it may be argued it must be able to distinguish some other colour or colours, perhaps opposite ones in the spectrum.

The 29th was a Friday. After breakfast it went out early in the morning and returned after an hour. I could hear its calls. While I was busy with some work, I heard the wailing of a bird -- sure, some bird should have been in danger, perhaps a sparrow. Instantly I made for the spot from where the sound was heard. A neighbour of ours seeing the chick was caught by a jungle crow and throwing stones, so the crow too moved from one building top to the other, all the while the chick hanging in its beak and crying desperately. Other crows in the vicinity hearing the cry of the chick were gathering in number caw-cawing and circling above us, and so were our neighbours who one after another came out of their houses and joined us in throwing and shouting. In the tumult one voice rose above: "stop throwing stones, let the crow place the chick somewhere." At least one had his wits about him. At

once the shouting stopped. Kotur was still in the beak of the crow and continued to cry pitiably, one wing in the beak of the crow and the other portion dangling. Luckily, as expected the crow settled down on one of the building tops, put the chick under its feet and was taking stock of the situation. In the next moment, as it were, it found itself surrounded by a volley of stones thrown from below and noise more deafening. In confusion the crow loosened its grip over the body and flew away.

The chick wasted no time. It was weak, it could only keep its wings spread out and it flowed down towards us. As it fell on a cluster of parched grass I took the bird and held in the hollow of my palm. My fingers could feel its fast pounding heart. It was gasping for breath. It turned down the water we gave it to drink, But it ate a little ripe plantain. Afterwards it refused to eat or drink anything. At times it was seen with one of its eyes close — a sign of weakness among birds. I had to go to office, so loosely swathed the chick in a piece of cloth and kept it between two rows of books. It was getting better and after some fifteen minutes it flew out and perched on a tiny twig of its favourite mango sapling.

On the following Sunday (31st May 1954), I got up early in the morning and as usual waited for Kotur's arrival. Generally it appeared at about 6.30 a.m. But today it did not come even at 7.00. I wandered all over the area searching for the chick. No trace of it. I watched crows and children especially when they made loud noises. At last I tried to console myself that the bird would have gone right from the roost to a place where it used to visit after breakfast. Yet it seemed very unlikely. Kotur never remained absent for more than four hours at a time. Hour after hour passed. In the evening I again made enquiries but the end was same; and now I knew that I would never recover it.

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#### HERALDERS OF THE MONSOON

By

L. A. Hill

I am working with an Iron Ore Mine in the north of Orissa. The ore is situated on the slopes of the Bonai Range, rising here from 1500-3000 ft. above sea level. These slopes are covered in high jungle, many sal trees and the valley below is well wooded, with paddy fields on the flat ground.

I arrived in India in November 1962, and it took me some time to get to know the local birds.

In June 1963, I noticed four large birds of a species I had not previously seen: they were circling round close to the ground near an erupting termite nest, and were taking the flying ants on the wings, catching them with their claws and transferring them to their beaks while in flight. I later identified these birds as Brahmany Kites.

According to Salim Ali, Whistler, and Stuart Baker, these birds are associated with water and I saw nothing unusual in the appearance here as we do have a small river, the Karo, running through the valley.

Their primary flight feathers were in very poor condition, with several missing altogether, which gave their wings a ragged look.

I noted that they disappeared again after the end of the monsoon.

In succeeding years it became apparent that they always arrived just a few days before the monsoon and left after the monsoon was over. The pertinent dates are as follows:

| <u>Year</u> | <u>First sighting</u> | <u>Arrival of monsoon</u> |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| 1963        | 27 June               | 14 June                   |
| 1964        | 2 June                | 19 June                   |
| 1965        | 9 June                | 21 June                   |
| 1966        | 10 June               |                           |

(It is quite possible that in 1963 I did not notice their original arrival and that they actually arrived earlier.)

At the beginning of the monsoon, usually by the end of June, our paddy fields are water logged and there is plenty of water around, other than that in the Karo River. But on the date that the kites arrive in this area there is no flood water at all, and I am surprised that this local migration should take place before the land is inundated. I would assume that the birds hail from the Cuttack area where there is plenty of water all the year round.

I have no records of their departure dates and can only say that they stay in this vicinity for the whole period of the monsoon, departing again in September or October.

I have never seen more than 4 or 5 in this area -- this year I have seen two only -- and every year their wings have the same ragged moth-eaten look!

While I would be pleased if they were resident here, as they are such fine-looking birds, I must say that I appreciate the annual joy which they give on first being sighted, when their arrival announces that the monsoon will soon be with us!

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

The 9th General Assembly and the 10th Technical Meeting of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) was held at Lucerne from 25th June to 2nd July. Nearly 300 delegates from 45 countries attended. Shri Hari Singh, Inspector-General of Forests, and the Editor of this Newsletter were the two representatives from India. These General Assembly Meetings are held every third year, the previous two were in Poland and Kenya, and the next one will take place in New Delhi in 1969. The Government of India must be congratulated in having extended the invitation to the IUCN, thus giving positive proof of their intention to support conservation policies.

The IUCN's main objective is the preservation of species and habitats, and it can be safely assumed that readers of this Newsletter are fully committed to support this movement. The IUCN is keen to maintain contact with conservationists all over the world and wishes to encourage individuals to become FRIENDS OF IUCN in order to obtain wider support and, by means of the Bulletin, to keep as many people as possible informed of IUCN activities". \$3 per annum is all that you need to pay and a remittance could be sent to the Secretary-General, IUCN, Morges, Switzerland.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### Dog's hair used for nest by Ashy Wren Warblers

I am writing to you to inform you of a pair of Ashy Wren Warblers that are nesting in our neighbour's house. They have built their nest just like the tailor bird's. I saw one of them pecking at dry straw and trying to break it into finer (thinner) straw to be woven into a nest.

Whenever I brush my dog, which is a pomeranian, he sheds a lot of hair. I collected it and put it near the nest; to my surprise and enjoyment the birds utilized the hair very happily and now it stands out white against the green.

Ravindra Bhambral

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Arrival of Watercock just before the rains

I just saw a Watercock nearby (20.vi.1966). I saw several last year also at this time. They seem to come over just before the rains.

Y.S. Shivraj Kumar of Jasdan

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Zafar Futehally  
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# NEWSLETTER

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## BIRDS AND THE FLOWERING CHERRY

By

Usha Ganguli

I spent three weeks in autumn at Ranikhet (6000 ft.) in Kumaon Hills from October 25th to November 15th 1965. I had not expected to see any wild flowers at that time of the year in a hill station. So when I saw the Wild Cherry, Prunus pudum, in flower in and about Ranikhet I was very pleasantly surprised and a good deal puzzled. Why does the Wild Cherry which I believe is indigenous to north-western Himalayas, flower in autumn when normally spring would be the blossoming time for most flowering and fruit trees? The only other tree in flower was the eucalyptus though only a few trees in each grove had flowered.

Considering that the eucalyptus belongs to Australia in the Southern Hemisphere I was not surprised at this late flowering, for October would be springtime in Australia. On the other hand, I have seen a variety of eucalyptus blazing with orange-red flowers in June in Ootacamund. A botanist probably would have an answer to this vexing problem. For myself, I was happy that the wild cherry was in flower while I was there. The trees were leafless and completely covered with soft pink blossoms. They attracted a variety of insects including bees which I thought would in turn attract different kinds of birds feeding on them. What baffled me was that the birds which visited these blossoms came mainly for the nectar and not for the insects!

The following is a list of birds which visited the wild flowering cherry trees.

The Brownfronted Woodpecker (Dendrocopos auriceps) was a regul

present. At first I thought that the various insects, visiting the flowers for their nectar had attracted the Woodpeckers. But its mode of feeding left no doubt as to its interest in these flowers. The bird would dip the tip of its bill into the heart of a flower and keep it there for a few seconds. It would repeat this process, from flower to flower. I never saw it swipe the crawling or clinging insects in the blossoms with its extensile tongue as a Wrenneck does when feeding on ants. The deliberate placing of the tip of the bill in the heart of each flower did not suggest picking off insects. So I assume that the birds feed on nectar though no book mentions this fact, although the Sapsuckers of America (Sphyrapicus) are known to bore holes in tender barks of trees and drink the sap that oozes from the holes.

The West Himalayan Pied Woodpecker (Dendrocopos himalayensis) was seen to visit a cherry tree once but it did not feed; it saw me and left in a hurry.

The Scalybellied Green Woodpecker (Picus squamatus) was seen on two occasions deeply engrossed in feeding on nectar the same way as the Brownfronted Woodpecker.

The Whitechecked Bulbuls (Pycnonotus leucogenys) were the most persistent feeders. In summer, these bulbuls are much more in evidence. In autumn, with restricted food supply of both insects and wild fruit, their number had dwindled. I saw small numbers only on the flowering cherry, the flowering eucalyptus, and some rose bushes which had bunches of yellow berries.

The Black Bulbul (Hypsipetes madagascariensis) were infrequent visitors to these blossoms for nectar. I once watched one at Saharanpur in late March, feeding on the nectar of Erythrina. Salim Ali mentions that they are fond of the nectar of Rhododendron, eucalyptus, grevillea, and erythrina.

**The Redbilled Babbler (Stachyris pyrrhops) is not a familiar** bird in the west Himalayan hill stations. I had seen it only once before in the Kulu Valley in June. I sent sketches to both Bombay Natural History Society and the British Museum (Bird Room) and the identification was the same from both sources. I must confess that the red bill was not apparent either in June in Kulu when I saw a flock with fledglings or in autumn at Ranikhet. This babbler was a great skulker and fed on insects. But once, a single bird was seen feasting on nectar.

The beautiful Blackheaded Sibia (Heterophasia capistrata) were seen in small flocks in cherry blossoms at places ranging from 7000 ft. to 5000 ft. Once three of them were so engrossed in nectar sipping on a small wayside tree that I walked to within ten feet of them without their noticing my presence. Jean Delacour, writing on babblers in A NEW DICTIONARY FOR BIRDS mentions that Heterophasia feed on nectar and pollen of flowers as well as on berries and insects.

The only bird that visited the cherry blossoms for insects was a species of Phylloscopus. It was like Pallas's Leaf Warbler (Phylloscopus prorogulus) in size, colouring and behaviour but instead of a bright yellow rump it had a dull yellowish green rump which was very prominent as it hovered about the blossoms frequently. The primaries and secondaries were edged with yellowish white. Of two wing bars the lower was prominent. The chin, throat and breast were pale grey, lower abdomen and vent yellow. It had prominent supercilium and grey cheeks.

The Grey Tit, Parus major, is a summer visitor to Ranikhet. In autumn one or two were occasionally seen feeding on nectar.



(Aegithalos concinnus) together with the Yellowbacked Tit (Parus xanthogenys) were present in summer. But every flowering cherry tree in autumn had its quota of these tits, the first two being more numerous than the third. I saw Parus modestus (Yellowbrowed Tit) for the first time in a flowering cherry tree along with leaf warblers. I was so busy in identifying it that I did not notice its mode of feeding. I subsequently saw it on other trees feeding on insects.

The Cinammonbellied Nuthatches (Sitta castanea) were frequent visitors to the cherry blossoms. Two males in a tree often chased one another. They were also seen seeking insects on the barks of these trees.

Blyth's Yellowbacked Sunbird (Aethopyga nipalensis horsfieldi) were seen only in flowering cherry and flowering eucalyptus trees. I do not know whether they are resident. I had not seen them in June in Ranikhet. Since nothing is known about their nomenclature or habits they were probably vagrants.

The Northern White-eyes (Zosterops palpebrosa) were regular visitors. I had seen them feeding on nectar in my garden. Salim Ali also mentions the White-eye's fondness for nectar.

The Cinammon Tree-Sparrow (Passer rutilans) were seen to visit these trees, but I somehow cannot recall whether they fed on nectar. I had watched yellow throated sparrows feeding on both the flower and nectar of erythrina; so I should not be surprised if the Cinammon Tree-Sparrow also had a 'sweet tongue'.

A male Pinkbrowed Finch once came to a cherry tree, plucked two/three flowers, threw them down and flew away.

Recently I learnt that the quality of Prunus puddum honey is excellent. It is very dark and not easy to get as the season has to be just right for the flowers to produce honey.

The flowering eucalyptus also attracted the Brownfronted Woodpeckers, the White Checked Bulbul, the tits, the Cinammonbellied Nuthatches, Blyth's Yellowbacked Sunbird and White-eyes. I believe that the above mentioned birds were attracted to flowers of the eucalyptus for nectar.

In all the ornithological literature available to me I find no mention of nectar as a supplementary food for the birds listed above except the sunbird and the tree birds mentioned earlier, i.e. Black Bulbul, Sibia, and White-eyes.

Autumn is a lean season for insects and berries. So the different species of birds took advantage of the brief flowering of these trees to supplement their diet.

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KHANDALA DIARY (May 1966)

By

Adil Dubash

12th May: This evening we explore the beautiful patch of forest which lies below 'Duke's Nose'. We cross a barren and rocky terrain through which runs a nullah. A couple of pairs of Crested Larks and a Redwattled Lapwing play pranks on the ground. On reaching the edge of the forest, we hear a rustling sound in the thickets and out flies a Spur Fowl. It is surprising to note that we do not hear the calls or find any trace of the Grey Junglefowl usually to be found in this area.

Brother Navarro says that the weather should be a little warmer for these birds to call out and move frequently. Along the tall cliffs of rock near 'Duke's Nose', a pair of Longbilled Vultures soar high up in the blue sky. Here we also observe the Brown Flycatcher, the Tickell's Flycatcher and the Blacknaped Blue Flycatcher. On a tree is a Hood-Shrike with a huge insect in its beak. Everywhere in the forest we can hear the sweet whistling of the Blackbird and the Whitethroated Ground Thrush.

I see a pair of Yellowbacked Sunbirds flitting between the tiny pink flowers of a huge shady tree. As we come near the wooded nullah of Tata Hydro-Electric Co., we disturb a School Boy (Malabar Whistling Thrush) from its bath. On our way back we try to locate some Nightjars. The year before last we had discovered the eggs of the Common Indian Nightjar at this spot which lies just behind Khandala Hotel.

13th May: 3-7 p.m. We go hitch-hiking to the new Dastoori by the private Tata H.-E. Power Station Road which goes right down to Khapoli. This area is teeming with bird life. We see a number of Grey Junglefowls and often hear the loud call of the shama. I find that the Whitethroated Ground Thrush is very shy and shuns the presence of man. It perches on top of a high tree and sings uninterruptedly; or else it hides in thick undergrowth and then it is extremely difficult to observe. But the Whitethroated Ground Thrush is an excellent mimic and can imitate the calls of other birds like that of the Goldfronted Chloropsis, Blackbird, etc. found in this area.

On the bark of an old barren tree, about four or five Maratta Woodpeckers, are busy excavating every nook and corner of the bark in search of insects. Late in the afternoon we scare a hare from a bush.

We expect to see some owls on our return, but nothing shows up. This, however, is compensated by another addition to our bird list, namely the Whitebellied Drongos. Some of these birds are quite young which we can make out from their tender plumage. This proves that the Whitebellied Drongs have already nested. Most of the birds which we see during these two days carry all sorts of insects in their bills. Does this indicate that they are feeding their young?

14th May: We start early in the afternoon and make for the hills adjoining the old Reversing Station. The day is very sultry and the walk up the hills seems long and tiring. As we enter the forest the first of its denizens to welcome us is the shama, a gorgeous specimen indeed with an exceptionally long tail. As we proceed further we sight some Grey Junglefowls in a small patch of open ground. In the thick undergrowth of Karvaanda and other thorny bushes, the Quaker and Spotted Babblers are hopping from twig to twig; some come down to the ground searching for tiny insects in the dry leaves. We can hardly move anywhere in the forest without making a noise because of the thick layers of dry leaves.

A Serpent Eagle is seen resting on the branch of a tree. Behind a hill we spot a hawk but we do not have a chance to identify it. As we enter another part of the forest, a Green Pigeon flies out from a tree. Some Bluewinged Parakeets dash through the foliage pell-mell.

This area is full of Golden Orioles which give their flute-like calls at short intervals. Blackbirds are to be seen everywhere. The Indian Stone-Chat and the Indian Robin are to be found in good numbers in clearings at the edge of forests. Again we come across a brace of Junglefowl. Brother Navarro remarks that he has, in the previous years, seen the Red Junglefowl on this spot

as also the Bluewinged Parakeet and the Tree Pie.

15th May: Along the nullah a variety of birds flock together for a dip in the fresh water. One has only to sit quiet under cover of some bush to observe the Flycatchers and bulbuls occupied in taking a bath in the flowing stream. On our way home we chance to see the Yellow Bulbul which offers me its first glimpse.

16th May: 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. In a patch of thick undergrowth, I espy two or three Scimitar Babblers and a group of Seven Sisters. Yellow Bulbuls and Goldfronted Chloropsis call out at a distance; we do not have a clear look at them because the jungle around is thick and impenetrable.

17th May: Late in the evening about 6.45 p.m., we go out for a stroll hoping to come across some nightjars which we have seen practically every year. Our efforts go unrewarded, but instead we come upon a brace of quail feeding in the open.

18th May: The absence of the Grey Hornbill in this part of the forest is very striking, although we observe a number of Jungle Fynas and both the varieties of Green Barbets, big and small. In the evening (from 6 to 8) we again walk up near the wooded nullah, in the hope of seeing some owls. At first nothing turns up, as most of the birds are busy selecting a perch to spend the night. At about 7.15 p.m. a hawk-like bird suddenly flies overhead whose underparts (belly and breast) are of a whitish colour. Dr. Navarro identifies the bird as the Hawk-Owl seen by him several times in the previous years in the same place. It is the first time that I have ever seen this bird.

22nd May: We go to the ravine which can be seen from Rajmachi Point, an excellent spot for birdwatching. This valley runs parallel to the rail track near Nanjat where it gradually ends into the plains below.

On the way we see a pair of Whitebacked Vultures and the Crested Swift flying along the slopes of the hills. Up a high tree (30-40 ft.) are a pair of Rufous Woodpeckers. School-Boys are all around the place. Blossomheaded Parakeets are flying across with tremendous speed.

At the lake we see the Little Grebe, Pheasant-tailed Jacana, and Pond Herons.

24th May: Today we explore the place near Cooney Mission. This area is supposed to be one of the wildest parts to be found in and around Khandala. Br. Navarro points out to us a huge thick creeper which runs along the trees for miles together. Here on several previous occasions we have seen the Threetoed Kingfisher, a tiny bird which has multi-coloured plumage. On the way back we see on the Cooney Mission plateau a Stone Plover running along the ground.

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#### XIV WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR BIRD PRESERVATION

By

Zafar Futchally

The XIV World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation was held in Cambridge, England, from 11th to 15th July 1966. From India Dr. Salim Ali, Mr. Humayun Abdulali, both of the Bombay Natural History Society, Dr. Biswanoy Biswas, Dr. Helen Spurway, and Mr. S.D. Jayakar participated.

Some of the resolutions passed which are particularly important for India are reproduced below:

- 1(a) HAVING NOTED that many pesticides have had lethal consequences on birds and other animals, either directly or by the eating of poisoned prey or through the impairment of fertility, and having noted the progress in securing Governmental control of pesticides in certain countries, and having noted the fact that especially in the case of birds adverse effects on wildlife can best be reduced or eliminated if controls are consistent and universal, and having reviewed the Resolution No. 2 passed at the New York Conference of the I.C.B.P. in 1962.

REAFFIRMS the Recommendation that Governments adopt legislation or regulation by which pesticides shall only be applied at minimum effective concentration, and

URGES all Governments which have not already done so:

- (1) To compel the reduction of the manufacture, scale or use of persistent or cumulative pesticides and to encourage their replacement by safer compounds;
- (2) To arrange that the effects of pesticides in their countries be kept continually under review and investigation and that manufacturers, importers, exporters and wholesale distributors of pesticides furnish statistics of the amount of their sales of pesticides;
- (3) To prohibit the manufacture, sale, importation or exportation of pesticides which have been banned in the country of origin or which have already been found in any country to involve excessive hazards;
- (4) To require that manufacturers and distributors of pesticides, and of products containing pesticides, label such pesticides and other products with their complete chemical composition, with their correct dosage, and with their possible hazard to wildlife;
- (5) To encourage the investigation of biological controls of insect and other pests.

to bird ringing organisations and to Governments with regard to the necessity for safeguards:

Considering the danger which threatens wild birds in most countries through bird ringing methods, strongly recommends that

- (a) no bird ringing (banding) should be allowed unless organised and controlled through a single national organisation by scientific authorities;
- (b) ringing (banding) of nestlings should be done only by a limited number of trained ornithologists specially licensed;
- (c) efforts should be made to concentrate bird ringing activities on particular investigations and to avoid ineffective or useless mass ringing and/or ringing which might be a danger to rare species.

It is gratifying to note that the next Ornithological Congress is proposed to be held in India in 1969 at the same time as the meeting of the General Assembly of the International Union for

## THE IUCN GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT LUCERNE : JUNE 1966

By

Zafar Futehally

As was reported in the last issue of this Newsletter the 9th General Assembly of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources was held at Lucerne from 25th June till 2nd July. Lucerne is a splendid place to hold a conference from every point of view. It is a small city around a spectacularly beautiful lake, surrounded by snow clad mountains, and most places can be reached on foot in a few minutes. The Conference Hall, next to the Railway Station, was a five minutes' walk from my hotel and no taxi expense had to be incurred for all the ten days I was there. When the next Conference takes place in New Delhi in 1969 our organisers must keep this factor in mind, in spite of the fact that transport in Delhi will be cheap for the foreigner in terms of the falling rupee.

Meeting and listening to conservationists is always a stimulating experience, and the occasion becomes more rewarding when the Secretariat has done the groundwork well, and every delegate gets the papers in good time. The Secretarial staff of the IUCN at Lucerne, including the Secretary-General spent many sleepless nights in their successful attempt to keep the delegates supplied with paper. For this they deserve to be warmly thanked.

Two important themes of the Conference of which we should take note were: The Impact of Tourism on Temperate Environments, and Conservation Education at the University Level. Our increasing number of tourists must treat the environment more kindly, and our educationists must think of introducing courses on Conservation in our schools and colleges, so that the coming generation treats our natural assets with the care and consideration they deserve.

The discussions on the ecological impact of introducing new species in an area was of great relevance from our point of view because the character of many of our forests is being changed by planting trees not indigenous to the area. Eucalyptus is being planted everywhere rather extensively, purely because it is a fast growing species and its wood will be useful for paper factories etc. But eucalyptus unfortunately does not attract birds and animals and from that point of view its introduction in our biotopes is likely to be unfortunate. In one of the papers submitted to the Conference it was pointed out that a forest with an undisturbed indigenous flora has great strength, and the accidental introduction of an exotic plant or animal cannot impair it in any significant way. But if the original complex is changed artificially it can succumb easily to exotic influences. In the Periyar Sanctuary which has a beautiful undisturbed climax forest eucalyptus is being planted on a large scale. This matter was brought to the attention of the meeting, and partly because of this the following Internal Resolution was passed.

"The Executive Board is asked to set up a working group of the ECOLOGY COMMISSION to arrive at a conclusion, and lay down a policy on the introduction of exotic species and other related problems arising from the contributions and discussions of Part III of the 10th Technical Meeting."

An interesting fact which was brought to light in the meetings was the part played by National Parks in contiguous areas between countries in solving border disputes. Some delegates pointed out the possibility of further investigations in this direction. The relevant resolution passed reads as follows:

- "The Executive Board is asked to arrange for further study of the formation and management of contiguous national parks in border areas of neighbouring states, as one way of furthering international collaboration and the ideals of Conservation."

The Rann of Kutch, perhaps, qualifies for such an investigation if the breeding ground of flamingos lies in disputed territory. If not, the matter need not be pursued.

Then 300 delegates meet and talk for ten days a tremendous number of ideas emerge, and the Resolutions Committee has a hard task in separating the chaff from the grain. A policy decision was taken to limit the number to about twenty-five, so that these could be effectively followed up with Governments and others concerned. Let us hope that the IUCN will succeed in impressing all Governments with the importance of preserving species and habitats, which is raison d'être of its existence. The modern world is so obsessed with economic considerations, and so prone to take the short term rather than the long term view of things, that Conservationists cannot look forward to easy success. But the effort is well worth while.

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## NOTES AND COMMENTS

### International Wildfowl Count

Enclosed is an appeal from Wildfowl Trust in connection with an international wildfowl count during the winter of 1966/67. Those of our readers who are in a position to participate kindly communicate with the persons whose addresses are given in the enclosure depending on the areas where you would do your bird-watching.

### Nature Calendar for 1967

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a calendar prospectus of the Bombay Natural History Society. This calendar contains twelve coloured pictures of birds, animals, and insects of India and it would be a good gesture to the Society if readers of the Newsletter placed orders for a few of these. Please reply direct to the Society at the address given on the prospectus.

### Population explosions

Population explosions of various kinds are not uncommon in this country. But the Editor has never experienced a Caterpillar explosion of the type which now exists in the house and garden at Andheri. The species is Asura conferta Wlk. (a moth), a hairy insect whose exterior covering and internal protective juices make it unpalatable to birds. Several members of the Iusciapio found in the garden have been of no help in checking their numbers.

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## CORRESPONDENCE

### On 'Notur the story of the Coppersmith chick'

Students of bird behaviour will find valuable information in Shri Jose's notes on the Coppersmith chick. I found the following points to be of special interest.

1. Shri Jose noted 'mock feeding' (i.e. going through the motion of feeding in the absence of food). I think this is an 'intention movement' caused by internal factors like hunger, circulating hormones, etc. According to Tinbergen when such motivation crosses a certain threshold, significant intention movements appear even

though the situation is not appropriate.

2. Picking up of sand particles appears to me to be more of an exploratory activity rather than a direct effect of dietary deficiency. A chick has to learn about its food by trial and error.

3. Shri Jose noted how the chick learned to ignore irrelevant noises. I think this is an instance of learning by 'habituation'. By not responding to insignificant stimuli the chick saves energy.

4. Response to red colour may be of biological significance to the species, but to draw conclusions about colour perception of the bird based on a single fact is unsound. The bird's perceptual world may be different from ours.

D.H. Mathew  
Bombay Natural Hist. Society

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### Himalayan Birds

On April 18 at Thyangboche (near base of Everest) 13,300 ft. there was a drizzle of snow fall at 5.30 p.m. Since it became very cold we (wife, son, and father) closed all the doors and windows of the rest house. In the backyard we soon saw two different kind of birds. The little snow -- hardly one-tenth of a centimetre -- had brought to the surface of the earth some insects and both the kinds were living on them. They left after about an hour when the drizzle was over.

Our immediate notes read: 'Two beautiful pheasant or quail-like birds; under nose reddish; tail lined with reddish; thin stripes in a background of slightly pale yellowish green back. Female brownish; both about 17 to 18 inches long, and fat and round.'

I have now identified them as Blood Pheasants.

The other six birds were of the size of the myna, with reddish tinge near beak and near the tail. Body greyish brown with white streaks. I have not yet identified these from the books.

It is said that the national bird of Nepal is Daphne (in Nepali). Can any one tell me what the bird is?

S.R. Shah  
Scindia Steam Navg. Co. Ltd., Bombay

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### Birds in Siliguri

We are now examining our new territory with mounting delight. We expected to find that a tea garden would give us new friends but did not realise that we would have such an abundance of birds to watch! Many of them are old friends, some are quite new or rarely seen by us before -- at least one is a mystery! Could we really have seen a Wryneck here at this time of year? I am surprised to find so few crows -- and no kooks at all so far! I suppose this could be explained by the scarcity of their favourite foster parents, though there are crows to be found round the town.

Maurcen Thom  
Siliguri, W. Bengal

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### Mortality in the young ones of the House Sparrow

The Editors of the Newsletter have asked members to make a study of the House Sparrow.

I have kept records since 1964. I allowed this small but most troublesome bird to build nests in my room. The following observations were made at four different periods.

1. The number of eggs laid were four.
2. After incubation all the four young developed for some time. But only one survived in the end.

This shows that the number of eggs laid is satisfactory or fairly good, but the mortality of the young ones is 75 per cent.

B.J. Dangre  
Ahmednagar

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# NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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MISCELLANEOUS OBSERVATIONS ON BIRDS' NESTS  
IN WEST PAKISTAN

By

Tom Roberts

I have always recognised that compared with many of my birdwatching friends I am relatively unsuccessful in the art of discovering birds' nests, and I recall far too many occasions this year, when despite the revealing proximity of agitated parent birds, my clumsy searchings were in vain. However, the most interesting note about an Ashy Wren Warbler's use of dog hair for nest material, published in the August issue of the Newsletter, prompts me to set down some of the highlights of my nest discoveries of this past Spring and Summer. These not only reveal the resourcefulness of birds in their use of nesting materials, but regrettably have also showed me the extreme hazard a low percentage of successes which occur in the successful rearing of young.

In late March I was especially pleased to find a pair of White-eyes (Zoster palpebrosa) incubating eggs in my own garden (in south-west region of the former Punjab), as this meant that I could keep them under constant observation. Their tiny nest was the typical miniature Oriole's in form, slung from the fork of a twig; in this case a Pear tree still bearing late blossom and presenting an idyllic setting. Ours is a desert area with scanty ground vegetation, and the nest cup, instead of being composed of the usual grass fibres and hairs, was woven almost exclusively of string (jute twine). While feeding the still blind young, unfortunately the whole structure was torn and I did not discover the predator. Later in April, a pair of Shikras (Accipiter badius) built their platform nest in the topmost branches of a Terminalia tree also in my garden. It was balanced on comparatively slender branches and very high up, so that during a dust storm one evening, (they are common in the region at this season), the whole nest disintegrated. To my surprise they had built another nest within six days in a similar situation in another Terminalia tree nearby. I could see the female sitting on the nest on the seventh day, though no doubt the nest structure was reinforced and added to after the first egg was laid. This nest was discovered before I departed for my

as Eucalyptus and Silk Cotton, but it seems that the thick foliage cover afforded by the Terminalia was the prime consideration in April, at a time when shelter from the scorching sun is welcome to incubating birds. In our region the Silk Cotton is just sprouting new leaves during April.

Quite recently (August 21st), I stumbled upon the nest of a pair of Golden Orioles (Oriolus oriolus) in a small mango orchard. The agitated behaviour of both parent birds, who are normally so shy and elusive, indicated that the young had recently hatched. Such a late brood therefore seems interesting. Though my tree climbing days are long since over, I was able to ascend the tree far enough to see that the nest was built on the very flimsy outermost branches, and consisted of a very deep almost globular cup, suspended between two branches, and woven entirely with the bright reddish fibres from the leaf sheath of the date palm. These are coarse and immensely strong, and in that locality easily available, whereas grass fibres were not. The nest was very conspicuous in colour against the dark green of the mango leaves. Incidentally Dr. Dillon Ripley in his SYNOPSIS gives the distribution of this Oriole as breeding from the foothills of the Himalayas up to 11,500 feet and as a winter visitor only to the NW. plains. This is misleading as it is a regular visitor to the Punjab from April to early October, a few pairs always staying to breed.

In May whilst walking to the office I came across the nest of a pair of Tailor Birds (Orthotomus sutorius), sewn between two Amaltas (Cassia fistula) leaves. The stabbing of their bills had resulted in dessication of the leaves which had fallen to the ground and thus I found it. I believe this is a fairly common misfortune which befalls the Tailor Bird. The cup inside the leaves was made mostly from the silken fibres of the 'aak' plant (a desert succulent) mixed with long brindled hairs which could only have been dog hair. Last year, another nest in our garden was built between two Bougainvillea leaves which survived the rather random stabbing of their bills in the sewing operation but for unknown reasons, they later deserted the eggs.

Perhaps the ornithological highlight of my year was the discovery of a Paradise Flycatcher's nest (Terpsiphone paradisi). This was in mid April in an irrigated forest plantation near my home. In the dry NW., Paradise Flycatchers are only spring migrants breeding in the Himalayan foothills and further North (Afghanistan-Chitral); nowhere nearer than 400 miles from this plantation in fact. The freak nesting in the plains is therefore equivalent to Hugh Whistler's discovery of the Chestnutbellied Nuthatch (Sitta castaneiventris) in a mango tope in Ferozepur (recorded in the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society Vol. 24). Unfortunately this nest was also robbed. I do not know by what agency, as this happened after the young had hatched. I have kept the nest -- a perfectly formed stocking perched on a drooping mulberry twig. It is copiously decorated on its outside with White Spider Cocoons.

Two other discoveries, further afield, are worth mentioning. On a trip to Ziarat in NW. Baluchistan in late May, a parent Mistle Thrush (Turdus viscivorus) with beak full of insects led me direct to its nest in a gnarled old juniper tree. Compared to the solid nests of the species which I found during my boyhood in Britain, this Ziarat nest was much flimsier with liberal use of the split fibres of juniper bark and the inside cup instead of being mud was apparently made entirely from cow manure -- necessary adaptations to local conditions in such an arid rocky environment.

Traveling north to the Murree Hills, where we have a summer cottage at 8200 ft. elevation, two pairs of Large Crowned Willow Warblers (Phylloscopus occipitalis) successfully reared young during the same period of late June to early July, within 20 ft. of each other in crevices within the stone wall of the gable end of our house. A most unusual instance of territorial tolerance between two males of one species which is by no means typical of the Phylloscopidae. It must however be added that this cheerful and active little warbler is extremely plentiful in the Murree Hills in summer.

One could ramble on as other incidences come to mind, I still feel frustrated when I recall the finding of a Coucal's (Centropus sinensis) nest and Sind Jungle Sparrow (Passer pyrrhonotus) both in totally inaccessible situations, as these species nests were new 'finds' for me.

By

Vasant Nilakanta

We were instantly awake when called up at five in the morning by a series of 'wolf whistles'. After a tiring journey from Bombay we were once again on the sea coast, in a casuarina plantation just south of the Adayar River in Madras. We had got used to sleeping through the noise of the surf and even the jet liners taking off over our heads, at Juhu, scarcely disturbed us but the 'wolf whistles' were different. Only the first half of the conventional 'wolf whistle' was uttered and was accompanied by a variety of shrieks.

The whole grove was alive with noises and every few minutes the shattering calls of Whitebrowed Bulbuls would penetrate through every room in the house. We hurriedly got ready and with our field glasses ran out of the house. The whistlers were found to be black looking mynas with bright orange bills. Some were sitting on the top of a casuarina tree and another group was circling overhead, calling all the time. One glance through the binoculars revealed yellow skin on the nape of the necks and identified them as Hill Mynas.

One bird appeared to be carrying a small egg in its bill. Further examination showed many birds on English Tamarind trees, busily peeling the spiral pods and recovering the fruit. The birds had some difficulty in detaching the fleshy outside from the inedible black seed. This was sometimes achieved by carrying the fruit (which, from a distance, resembled a small egg) to a casuarina tree and battering it on a suitable branch. Keeping this trophy in the bill in no way lessened the piercing quality of its whistles.

On subsequent days, we had many occasions for observing this group of about fifteen birds, which were sometimes seen, half a kilometre inland, on a banyan tree in fruit. As usual, while a few sat on the tree, the others would be flying overhead, in circles of about 500 metres radius and some 100 metres from the ground. From this height they, no doubt, had a view of a wide area. The birds overhead were in continuous vocal communication with those on the tree and appeared to have a highly developed social order.

When we had been to this place three summers ago, we had not encountered any Hill Mynas. From enquiries made, we learnt that they have been here for about two years. We did not observe any breeding colony, but suggestions that these may be escaped cage birds may be reasonably discounted.

which are

Generally the casuarina grove on the beach attracts birds/fond of dry country. This particular grove had a number of neem, sandal and English Tamarind trees growing between the casuarina trees. For a great many years this place had been a roost for many birds and the undergrowth including lantanas, has no doubt started from bird droppings. The thick mat of dead needles has not been removed for many years.

It must be presumed that abundance of food, scarcity of natural enemies and absolute freedom from being molested by man has induced this flock of Hill Mynas to stay on in this place, in spite of the general dry weather and May temperatures of 42°C.

One day a Hill Myna sat on a broken palmyra tree and peered into the hollow bole in which a pair of Common Mynas were raising their young (probably the same pair and certainly the same tree seen in May 1963 and mentioned in Newsletter 6(4)). No other bird had ever dared to do this earlier. The rightful owner of the nest at once rushed to the spot but watched the intruder from a distance of 2 metres. After about half a minute the Common Myna flew up the edge of the broken stump making the Hill Myna vacate its perch. The latter stepped back about one metre to an overhanging branch of another tree. Continued curiosity by the Hill Myna was now tolerated and nothing more was said.

Although the Hill Mynas and Whitebrowed Bulbuls were the first in the morning to visit the English Tamarind trees, they were followed by a succession of

Less noisy, but yet distinctly audible songsters were Ioras and Magpie Robins. On previous occasions it was noticed that several abandoned nests of Ioras were built of casuarina needles. They were usually built on sandalwood saplings. The needles must provide building material for numerous small birds, such as a pair of Whitebacked Munias found building a globular nest in 1963 and which helped me to draw the cover illustrations for the later issues of Vol. 3. This nest was reached by standing on the top of my car; an operation which should never again be repeated as the roof of the car gets damaged.

The casuarina trees on the verge of the beach provided perches for a number of Bluetailed Bee-eaters and Black Drongos. Even Ashy Swallow-shrikes joined these and at times all three ~~xxxx~~ could be seen sitting on the same branch but at no time were two birds engaged in chasing after the same insect. The deeper 'True-roo-roo' of the Bluetailed Bee-eater is somewhat different from the 'Tree-ree-ree' of the Common Green Bee-eater.

Three years back, on the night that we arrived, there was a heavy thunder shower. The sand on the beach was rendered quite wet. The next morning, I found over a dozen Bluetailed Bee-eaters sitting on the sand. In fact, they had made a little hollow on the surface and their breasts were pressed against the wet sand. Again on 30th April and 1st May 1966 there was a cyclonic storm and the following morning these bee-eaters were sitting pressed against the sand.

Every morning I saw bee-eaters and drongos sitting on the sand close to the edge of the sea. Their attitude was different. They were actually perched there to catch small white sand crabs. Later on in the day, when it became hot, all birds except a pipit, which defied identification, avoided the sand.

Sand crabs of all sizes were available in abundance. The breeding mynas, mentioned earlier, often fed their young with sand crabs. Mongooses and young jackals have been seen playing with sand crabs, like a kitten playing with a mouse, before crunching their victim with noisy enjoyment. Palm Civets, though common and destructive to the coconut plantation further inland, were absent in the casuarina grove. There were no House Crows in the near vicinity and no House Sparrows for two kilometres.

A pair of Jungle Crows, however, had built a nest in the casuarina tree nearest to the house. A close approach to the tree, by my walking on the flat roof of the house, used to excite the crows to frenzied demonstrations of tearing up twigs and throwing them down. Jungle Crows at Juhu tear up coconut fronds when we come too close to their young, when the latter are learning to fly.

Severe mobbing by this pair made a long brown snake climb down from a neighbouring casuarina tree. The snake disappeared into the space between the mat of casuarina needles and the actual ground, before it could be identified, but not before provoking a lot of excitement in its human observers, as well as in the numerous Threestriped Palm Squirrels and Whiteheaded Babblers, which joined in voicing their shrill protest.

Whiteheaded Babblers are the commonest garden birds in Madras. Unlike sparrows and crows, they are not partly dependent on man for providing food nor do they build their nests in man-made constructions. Yet, they thrive in the gardens and suburbs of this sprawling city.

Whiteheaded Babblers hunt in close parties, calling each other with musical sounds, and in the company of palm squirrels. Babblers and squirrels understand each other's alarm calls, which are sounded at the least provocation. An incident like a coconut frond crashing down sets off all the babblers and squirrels in the neighbourhood — the squirrels with their pip-pip-pip and the babblers with a loud musical trl-rl-rl.

One of my plans was to catch a Whiteheaded Babbler, and after banding it, to release the same, a kilometre away near another flock. The idea was to see whether the bird returns to its original flock or joins the nearest group. In the latter event, would the others accept it as a full member and allow it to cuddle up to them? Would they tenderly stroke the back of its neck or

pick its outstretched wing. I am not even able to find any leadership in a flock of these birds. Does a pair go off separately to build a nest? If they do, when do the fledglings join the flocks? All these interesting studies, however, were cut short for want of time.

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## PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD NESTING

By

L. A. Hill

One day in July my wife happened to mention that she had been hearing the little trilling notes of a sunbird singing outside our sitting room window for several days running. The following day, while we were sitting there after lunch, she pointed to the bougainvillea just outside and said 'There it is!' I looked, and was surprised and pleased to see a female sunbird building a nest! I later identified the male as a Purple-rumped Sunbird.

Ever since we arrived here, four years ago, we have been building up a garden, and as the bushes, creepers and trees have grown, I have noticed that we have been attracting several species of birds in the last couple of years which I had not previously seen in the garden. These included Purple and Purplerumped Sunbirds; Tailor Birds; Redbreasted Flycatchers; and Rubythroats, the last two being, of course, migrants. This was very gratifying since the jungle is close by.

I can only assume that the Pied Mynas have been attracted by the well-watered lawns, but there were certainly none in the vicinity for the first two years we were here. The sunbirds are particularly attracted by the bushes of Hamelia patens and Tecoma capensis.

Apart from the nests of Pied and Common Mynas, House Crows, and Sparrows, I had not previously seen others, and assumed that the other birds were nesting in the thick, wild and impenetrable bushes along the river bank, between the garden and the river.

We were therefore highly delighted to see this pair of sunbirds building their home; not only in the garden, but in such a place that we could easily observe them while reclining at ease in our own sitting room. They were behaving true to form, as stated by Salim Ali, and building close to 'an occupied bungalow'.

The nest was near the end of a slim bougainvillea branch, seven feet from the ground, and four feet away from the window. By using the sitting room as a hide (!!) I managed to take several photographs, but have not yet had them developed.

I have made a sketch of the nest -- slightly larger than life-size -- which is depicted on the cover of this issue. It was constructed almost entirely of grass woven into the shape of a pouch with a projecting porch over the entrance and was 'decorated' with pale pieces of lichen and what appeared to be little dark balls of caterpillar droppings. Suspended below it by means of fine hairs and spider's webs was an untidy 'beard' of lichen and these bunches of dark round objects.

The building was carried out entirely by the female who, at times, worked at a tremendous 'rate of striking', sometimes making a trip a minute for 10-15 minutes at a stretch.

We were most amused by the male which sat on a nearby perch throughout while building was in progress, preening itself, but which never failed to give little trills of encouragement every time its mate arrived at the nest. It very often gave her another burst of song as she left, just to hurry her along. He obviously thought he was doing all that was required of him by supplying the music while she worked.

When the eggs had been laid, the female spend long periods during the day in

the nest, and also throughout the night. Her head stuck out of the entrance, under the porch, and her eyes would often close for 5-10 seconds at a time.

Even after the eggs had hatched, she spent a good deal of her time, between feeding sorties, brooding the chicks.

The female carried out the bulk of the feeding duties: I only saw the male feeding the young on two occasions. I also saw him, on one occasion before the eggs had hatched, alight on the nest and peer in to see how things were getting along.

The following time table may be of interest:

|         |   |  |
|---------|---|--|
| 12 July | : | Started building?  |
| 16 July | : | First noticed nest being built.  |
| 22 July | : | Tempo of nest building slightly slowed the last two days -- possibly due to heavy rain. Today noted some feathers being brought for lining.          |
| 23 July | : | Started sitting in the nest. Noted she was still there at midnight.  |
| 24 July | : | Female sitting, on and off, all day and night.   |
| 4 Aug.  | : |  |
| 5 Aug.  | : | Noted her feeding the young for the first time.  |
| 6 Aug.  | : | Still feeding the young. After feeding, would often scramble to into the nest, turn round, and sit for a while with head projecting under the porch. |
| 20 Aug. | : |  |
| 21 Aug. | : | Did not appear all day, and when I poked my finger in the nest, found it empty.  |

Thus the total number of days that elapsed from the time of starting the nest until the young flew was as follows:

|                             |                |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Nest building .....         | 11 days        |
| Laying and incubating ..... | 13 days        |
| Feeding .....               | 16 days        |
| Total .....                 | <u>40</u> days |

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#### THREETOED KINGFISHER

By

S.R. Shah

On June 11, 1966 at 8.30 a.m., we (Dock workers) happened to watch the plight of a tiny bird which was being chased and manhandled by two crows near 'C' Shed, Princess Dock, Bombay. The crows preying on young ones of house sparrows is a common occurrence and does not attract attention. In this case, the bright metallic colours-flight looked like a flame coloured lightning streak and attracted attention because both the predator and the prey were conspicuously silent. Soon it got a good blow from a crow and fell near us. It was immediately picked up. I was happy to find that practically no injury had been done to this young one. I took it to my table and tied its legs with a string. Still it made vigorous attempts to fly away. It was ~~artreed~~ to see its short flight up to the length of the string.

With the usual exception of crows, kites, pigeons, house sparrows and sea gulls, birds are very rare in dock area. Rarely we see a flight of parakeets flying across from SW. to NE. A Rosy Pastor or a Wagtail is a still rarer sight. Hence this was a really pleasant surprise. I just wondered how this bird came to the docks. Naturally it was a straggler. I guess it flew across the creek from the thickly wooded forest or what I call Kihim of Salim Ali. From its behaviour and energy it was not a young one. Apparently it was a tired soul, a moment or so before it was attacked by crows.



The monsoon winds tire out pied crested cuckoos, pittas, and this kind at this time of the year, i.e. onset of monsoon and all three species fall an easy prey to crows.

On 10 June, I had read the June Newsletter. The remarks 'If you see a Three-toed quail, you can be sure it is one of this strange tribe' had registered a very strong impression on my mind and the very first thing I noticed was that this one had three toes.

From the longheavy pointed coral red bill, I guessed it to be a young one of a kingfisher. It was slightly smaller than a house-sparrow, though the big bill gave the impression that it was slightly bigger. Its head, rump and upper tail coverts were deep orange rufous glossed with lilac. The head had two black patches on the sides and one on the forehead. The back was blotched with blackish bright blue. Whole underpart was rich velvety bright golden yellow. The tail was rufous with a few streaks of red. There was not a single patch of white anywhere. Its legs were as red as the bill. I sent the bird to Mr. Nilakanta so that it may be correctly nursed and identified. He gave it adexoline, sardines, hardboiled eggs, water, etc. On the 12th June he was ready to ring it and photograph it with a camera-loaded and adjusted when to his dismay he heard a cry from his children 'It has escaped.'

He had identified it as Threetoed Kingfisher - Ceyx erithacus. I understand from him that it is a rare visitor to Bombay.

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#### UNUSUAL MATING BEHAVIOUR OF THE CROW

By

Prathap Chandran

From several observations during the 1966 breeding season of the crow, I believe that this bird's pre-copulation behaviour is as follows:

First the female vibrates her tail sideways, she then takes a submissive posture and the male mounts her, but before copulation there is much prodding and pecking between the pair. The female may strike a 'food-begging' posture before copulation. The male may hop from one branch to another shaking his head and tail before mounting. In my opinion, in crows, the female displays to the male:

On the 1st of June this year I noticed a peculiar and puzzling behaviour by a group of crows. I had under observation a crow on a mango tree in the Museum compound. Soon another crow perched about five feet away from the first. The new comer, sex unknown, started rapidly vibrating its tail sideways. The first bird approached it and promptly mounted on its back, balancing with the wings and with the tail bent down. The female spread her tail and copulation took place. Three other crows now mounted, one on top of another, on the copulating pair making a 'corvine pyramid'— five crows tall. In this process the bottom-most (female) bird lost its balance and the three 'extras' fell off but the first male was clinging on to the female's back till they both touch the ground and then separated.

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#### TRAGIC DEATH OF A DOMESTIC PIGEON

By

H.P. Mookherjee

One Sunday, I went out with my family to the cinema. When we returned home my wife saw the aluminium rice cooking vessel lying inverted. Curiously she lifted it and we were all surprised to see a dead pigeon inside it.

I came to the conclusion that perhaps, the pigeon had entered through the window and seen the vessel containing the rice. While busy with its meal, some sudden disturbances might have frightened it, and it tried to withdraw.

But the narrow neck of the vessel did not allow it to come out easily. In the struggle to escape the light aluminium vessel must have been overturned and the poor bird died, suffocated after a painful struggle.

H.P. Mookherjee

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

Enclosed in this Newsletter is a booklet on the IUCN. As was reported in an earlier issue the next General Assembly meeting of this organization will be held in New Delhi in 1969, and it is hoped that the occasion will be made use of by officials and non-officials alike to discuss usefully the problems of nature conservation in this country. Some of our readers may want to become FRIENDS OF IUCN, and the manner of doing so is described on the last page of the booklet.

The Editor would be grateful if those who wish to join inform him about their decision to do so.

\*\*\*\*

The letters in the Correspondence section indicate that the Editor has been functioning rather inefficiently. Any suggestions for changing the present incumbent will be welcomed.

\*\*\*\*

The sketch on the cover was copied from a drawing sent by L.A. Hill, whose article appears in this issue. Ever since cyclostyled covers have been used as a measure of economy, instead of the printed ones used previously, the worries of the Editor have been doubled. Formerly he had to worry only over the contents; now it is a problem of the cover also. It would be appreciated if subscribers (or non-subscribers) send in cover designs from time to time. And may I remind our talented member R.A. Stewart Melluish to apply his splendid calligraphy towards this cause -- and incidentally to fulfil a commitment made two summers ago.

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### 'Birdwatching in Khanewal - Pakistan' -- A Correction

I am afraid that this has been misquoted (Newsletter Vol.6(7)) and for the sake of accuracy perhaps, a correction should be published. All the birds mentioned in the note can be seen only on the sea coast and in particular I was referring to sitings within the environs of Karachi itself. I haven't seen any of those species near Khanewal which is about 640 miles north-east of the sea coast. I think what I probably wrote, was that I normally live (stay) in Khanewal which is rather a dull uninteresting area for birds whereas Karachi area is from my point of view very fascinating.

Two of the birds mentioned in the note -- Bartailed Godwits and Dunlin -- are I believe very much maritime in the feeding habits and I don't think one would ever get them nesting far from the sea coast. I often see the Blacktailed Godwit upcountry on the margins of jheels but never the Bartailed. I have taken the trouble to write this as I am afraid anyone reading the note in the July issue may discredit my report as being highly improbable -- that is if they could find Khanewal on the map!

T.J. Roberts

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'The Pied Crested Cuckoo'

In response to Mr. E.W. Ramble's letter (Newsletter Vol.6(5)) I would like to state the following:

This year, as it happened, the monsoon was late and there was a threatening draught in the eastern part of the country. But even then, I had the opportunity to record the arrival of the Pied Crested Cuckoo, said to be the indicator of monsoon, in the vicinity of Calcutta during the hottest days of the season.

On 17 May 1966, at about 3 p.m. or so when we were walking along the embankments of the big fishing bheries in north Salt Lake, a Pied Crested Cuckoo was seen for the first time in this season, in this area. This year most of the bheries were dried up. Small thickets and bushes were grown here and there on the sides of the embankments. The bird was perching on a Cestrum tree (variety of Munshana or Kat-ki-rani). As we approached, the bird flew from bush to bush uttering its note in its familiar way, and finally flew off towards the village, some 2 or 3 kilometres away. Since then more birds have arrived.

I would like to add that in the preceding season these were last seen on 9 October 1965.

S.S. Saha

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Grey Partridges and a Mongoose

It was Sunday the 21st August when I, with some of my friends, went for birdwatching to Kayar Lake, about 6 miles from Ajmer on the Jaipur Road.

Kayar Lake is 2 miles to the left of the main road and when we reached this place we waited for some of our friends who had been left behind. In the meantime I spotted a pair of Grey Partridges by the side of a broken wall. A few minutes later a pair of mongoose came out from the broken wall and advanced in the direction of the Partridges.

Seeing the mongoose coming, the birds gave a sharp cry and flew to the other side of the wall.

A few minutes later they returned to the same place but once again they were disturbed by the mongoose.

To my surprise this time the birds were not frightened but charged the animal half flying and half running. For about two minutes, the birds continued a keen attack on the mongoose. All of a sudden the mongoose turned back and ran away into the bushes nearby.

It was perhaps, because the mongoose had seen me standing near the wall and watching the fight.

I was sorry for being the cause of disturbing the bout. At the same time I think myself very fortunate for having seen such an interesting event.

Bharat Singh

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S.D. Jayakar writes to say that the report in the last Newsletter about his and Mrs. Spurway's presence at the I.C.B.P. meeting at Cambridge is incorrect. They were not at Cambridge but attended the International Ornithological Congress at Oxford. Apologies for the error. It just shows how difficult it is to report correctly on the basis of rumour.

# NEWSLETTER

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## FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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Volume 6—No. 11—1966 November



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A LIST OF BIRDS OBSERVED IN ASSAM  
AND NAGA HILLS

By

Pratap Singh, I.P.S.

I give below a list of birds observed in the Assam and Naga Hills. Many of them are an addition to my list. Considering the richness of avifauna of the area the list is quite unimpressive but then a personnel of the Security Forces in Nagaland is handicapped by the restriction on his movements imposed by the conditions of the 'Ceasefire'.

My wanderings in Assam were restricted to Sibsagar district which includes the Garampani and the Kaziranga sanctuaries. Apart from that, the many scattered tea gardens in the area provide great scope for birdwatching.

In Nagaland, the restriction of thousand yards around the post and a hundred yards on either side of the road, has proved very frustrating. I would add here that much of the jungle of Nagaland has given way to 'Jhoom' cultivation. It is an eye-sore to observe ranges upon ranges completely denuded of forest. This deforestation in my opinion certainly affects the density of bird life in the area. Often forested valleys, which are rare ~~xxxx~~ are a contrast to the scantily bird populated, deforested valleys. Apart from that, the Nagas are indiscriminate consumers of flesh and no bird is spared. One should not be surprised if even birds like the mynas, crows, sparrows, and kites are all together absent from the villages:

..... 1

The vegetation, as such, in Nagaland is patchy. The lower valleys damp and mosquito-ridden are a tangled mass of greenery where trees soar high from the entanglement of exuberant creepers. Thousands of clamouring arms claw the gnarled tree trunks in deadly embrace. From the prevalent conditions of days gone by of savagery and tribal warfare, a Naga feels safe perched on a hill-top. All villages are thus situated, while surrounding hill slopes and upper valleys are cultivated. Only the higher mountain features, like the Japvo (highest in Nagaland) and disputed valleys, are spared from cultivation. Certainly there are areas in the Sengmai district and the belt bordering Burma where awesome jungles blanket the hill ranges, but then my beat has been limited.

1. The Ringtailed Fishing Eagle: Should be common in the Assam plains but I only observed a pair, nesting in the Kaziranga Sanctuary in December.
2. The Crested Serpent Eagle: Commonly met in the forested areas of Assam. None observed in Nagaland.
3. The Black Eagle: Only observed one bird in Assam near Gauhati in January. None observed in Nambor or Kalyani forest or in Nagaland.
4. The Brahminy Kite: Common bird of marshlands of Assam plains.
5. The Shikra: Assam. Have not met in Nagaland.
6. The Besra Sparrow Hawk (?): A pair inhabit the slope of hill on which our post is situated. The bird very much resembles a Shikra but for the slender appearance, longer tail with distinct four bands, and heavily streaked with dark brown, head, throat, neck, breast and back.
7. The Barred Owlet: Came across one bird at Dimapur, which is down in the plains. I have not observed any in Naga hills and neither have I heard the call.
8. The Pigmy Collared Owlet: None seen or heard in Naga hills. Is a common bird in the forested areas of Assam. I have often observed the bird bravely perched on the very top of trees, in broad daylight, and calling. It seems the matutinal birds evidently accept the little fellow.
9. The Pied Harrier: A winter migrant to Assam plains. Commonly seen hawking over the paddy fields.
10. The Longtailed Nightjar (?): The bird not correctly identified but however heard calling in the jungles of Sonari.
11. The Brownthroated Spinetail Swift: These three birds have
12. The Whitethroated Spinetail Swift: been observed in the
13. Blyth's Whiterumped Swift: Naga Hills. The Brownthroated swift in its foraging descends down to Assam plains too. Mixed flocks of these birds are often met hunting on the windward side of the ridges. Three more swifts have been seen by me here but which I have failed to identify so far.
14. The Bluebearded Bee-eater: Only observed one bird at Sonari in Assam.
15. The Large Indian Pied Hornbill: It is a common bird in the Garampani sanctuary and the adjoining Nambor and Kalyani R.F. Large flocks of the bird are commonly met. It is also common in the forest belt between the Naga Hills and the plains where the Nagas hunt it for its feathers.
16. The Great Assam Barbet: It should be common in the forested areas of Assam but because of the heavy foliage it is not easily observed. I met the bird at Garampani.
17. The Lineated Barbet: Common in Assam and the lower forest of Naga Hills.
18. The Rufous Piculet: Naga Hills.
19. The Large Yellownaped Woodpecker: Naga Hills in forested areas.
20. The Rufous Woodpecker: Common in Assam. Commonly met in the shade of trees in Tea gardens.
21. The Pigmy Woodpecker: Common in Assam.

- : 3 :
22. The Large Cuckoo Shrike: Assam.
  23. The Scarlet Minivet: Assam and Naga Hills. Seen upto 6000 feet.
  24. The Orangebellied Chloropses: Assam and Naga Hills.
  25. The Fairy Blue Bird: Garampani Sanctuary, Assam. None met so far in Naga Hills.
  26. The Olive Bulbul (?): A commonly met bulbul in the forests of Assam and lower forests of Nagaland. It is a dainty little bird, slightly smaller than the Redwhiskered Bulbul. Is uniform olive-green with the tail blending into grey. Head and neck up to the collar, black, with a prominent crest. Yellow round the eye is conspicuous.
  27. The Striated Green Bulbul: Naga Hills.
  28. The Whitethroated Bulbul: Naga Hills.
  29. The Black Bulbul: Naga Hills. Quite common.
  30. The Redwhiskered Bulbul: Common in Assam but not seen above 4000 ft. in the Naga Hills.
  31. The Redvented Bulbul: A darker and heavier bird than the western race. Common in Assam and the Naga Hills up to 6000 ft.
  32. The Ferruginous Flycatcher: The Naga Hills.
  33. The Greyheaded Flycatcher: The Naga Hills.
  34. The Redbreasted Flycatcher: Assam and Naga Hills.
  35. The Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher: The Naga Hills.
  36. The Tickell's Blue Flycatcher: The Naga Hills.
  37. The Slaty-blue Flycatcher (?): The Naga Hills.
  38. The Verditer Flycatcher: Assam and the Naga Hills.
  39. The Brown Babbler (?): A common bird in the tea gardens situated on borders of forest tracts. It is a large babbler of the same size as the Large Grey Babbler. Is olive-brown above with tail shading into dark brown -- almost black. The chin, throat, cheeks dark brown, approximatelg to black. This deep shade continues to breast and abdomen. Met in sisterhoods of 10-12. Shy and noisy.
  40. The White Crested Laughing Thrush: Assam and Naga Hills. Not met above 4000 ft. It is very common in the tea garden in the winter.
  41. The Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush: The bird was met in the Theusang district of Nagaland. I have not recorded it elsewhere so far.
  42. The Large Brown Thrush: A common bird in the Naga Hills. It is more often heard than seen. The call is wee-too repeated at interval. A clumsy bird, partial to damp hillsides. The little note of wee-too it produces with considerable effort -- by jerking up its head.
  43. The Blackheaded Sibia: Common in the forested valleys of Nagaland.
  44. The Greenbacked Tit: The Naga Hills.
  45. The Silver-eared Mesia: Very common in the Naga Hills. Its call is a familiar jungle sound.
  46. The Redstart (?): A winter migrant to Assam. The bird I observed was in appearance exactly like the Common Redstart except for a conspicuous white wing patch.
  47. The Collared Bush Chat: Probably a winter migrant. I first recorded it in the Naga Hills on 8.ix.1966.
  48. The Dark Grey Bush Chat: Common in the Naga Hills in open hillsides.
  49. The Forktail: So far only one bird was recorded by me in the Naga Hills in November last year.

Many wagtails appear on the passage through Nagaland. They however are a confusing lot. This year the first bird was recorded by me on 8th September. Now they are in abundance. The only ones I have been able to identify are

The White Wagtail; The Grey Wagtail; Hodgson's Pied Wagtail (?); Swinhoe's Wagtail (?)

identification of the last two is not certain.

- bird was recorded on 10 September. It winters in Assam and where it is commonly met during that season.
52. The Redwinged Shrike Babbler: The Naga Hills, but not very common.
  53. The Grey Drongo: Common in the Naga Hills.
  54. The Haircrested Drongo: Common in Assam. Met occasionally in the Naga Hills up to 5000 ft.
  55. The Bronzewing Drongo: Naga Hills. Not very common. Only recorded by me in the Tuensang district in heavy forest.
  56. The Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo: Assam forests.
  57. The Tree Sparrow: Assam and the Naga Hills.
  58. The Cinnamon Sparrow: The Naga Hills.
  59. The Himalayan Tree Pie: Assam forests and the Naga Hills.
  60. Mrs. Gould's Yellowbacked Sunbird: Assam and Naga Hills.
  61. The Imperial Pigeon: A very common bird in the Garampani Sanctuary and the adjoining forest. Often large tracts of jungle echo with their deep call.
  62. The Speckled Pigeon: The Naga Hills. Not very common. Usually inhabit the inaccessible deep jungles.
  63. The Wedgetailed Green Pigeon (?): Common in Assam.
  64. The Rufous Turtle Dove: The Naga Hills.
  65. The Spotted Dove: It is the commonest member of the family in Nagaland.
  66. The Kalij Pheasant: It is a much darker bird than the White Crested Kalij. Is common in the Assam jungles and the forest belt between Assam plain and Nagaland hills. In winter it provides great sport in the tea gardens and the planters call it the 'Doric Pheasant'.  
In Nagaland certain pheasants are reported to occur but I have not come across any so far. Probably they inhabit the safer heights of Patkoi Range on the Burma border. I met only one bird which however offered little opportunity for identification. The bird was about the size of a village hen. The plumage was generally light fawn, heavily streaked and spotted with rufous.
  67. The Red Junglefowl: Common in the Assam jungles and the tea gardens.
  68. The Swamp Partridge: Common in Assam swamps. Much in abundance in the Kaziranga Sanctuary. The bird is more heard than seen. It is a difficult bird to flush.
  69. The Common Hill Partridge (?): One bird observed in Naga Hills at about 5000 ft.
  70. The Woodcock: It is common in Assam. The bird is occasionally seen at dusk flying low, probably changing its feeding ground.
  71. The Bluethroated Flycatcher (?): Two birds were observed in the Naga Hills. Probably common, but inhabit the deeper forested valleys. The bird is about the size of sparrow with longish tail. Above azure blue with tail inconspicuously tipped with white, the chin, throat, and upper breast distinct deep blue. In flight the tail appears somewhat graduated.
  72. The Greybacked Shrike (?): Probably a rare visitor in the area. Only observed one bird on 26 September. The bird I observed tallies in description closest to the bird mentioned above.
  73. The Great Hornbill: Naga Hills. Two birds were seen flying at an approximate height of 5000 ft. on a steady course due west, on 26 September. The flight was powerful and steady. Except for the long trailing legs they resembled the Adjutant Storks. Evidently it was a pair and in my opinion making a season descent to the warmer jungles of Cachar and Likir Hills from the Patkoi Range.
  74. The Blackbreasted Sunbird: Naga Hills. In the denser valleys.



50. The Blackheaded Shrike: Common in the Naga Hills.
51. The Brown Shrike: Probably migratory. This year the first bird was recorded on 10 September. It winters in Assam and where it is commonly met during that season.
52. The Redwinged Shrike Babbler: The Naga Hills, but not very common.
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74. The Blackbreasted Sunbird: Naga Hills. In the denser valleys

(From the Countryman, sent by Mrs Maureen Thom)

Anting is in many ways the most fascinating and controversial of all bird-insect associations. My interest in it started when a friend showed me how his tame jays spread their beautifully patterned wings in front of them to allow hordes of fierce wood ants to swarm over their plumage. Since that time I have seen anting by twenty-two kinds of bird in my own aviary, at the zoo and in the wild.

This behaviour is apparently confined to the great Passerine order of perching birds, of which about a hundred and thirty birds are known to ant. They include such familiar British birds as the carrion crow, rook, magpie, jay, blue tit, mistle thrush, song thrush, blackbird, robin, starling and chaffinch. Only a minority ant in the jay's special manner. Of those named the crow, rook and three larger thrushes also occasionally permit ants to crawl on them, but most birds ant in the more typical and active way. Instead of taking an ant 'bath', they seize one or more of the insects in the tip of the bill and rapidly contort, sometimes tumbling and tripping, into a highly characteristic pose. As the head is ducked down to apply the ant, one wing is held out and forward, and the tail comes round to the same side behind it. All this is accomplished so rapidly that it is hard for the observer to see exactly what is happening; but it is generally agreed that the bird is rubbing the ant on the under side of its primary and tail feathers. It then usually eats the insect, but some discard it. Both forms of anting result in the feathers being anointed with ant secretions, chiefly formic acid. Though few observers have identified the ants used, a recent compilation of records by an American ornithologist shows that these are mainly worker ants of the sub-family Formicinae, especially the dairying ants, which keep aphids and milk them for their sugary liquids, and the generally bolder and larger Formica ants. These do not sting but spray formic acid from the end of the gaster (abdomen).

Many explanations of anting are offered by naturalists. Some interpret it as a utilitarian or defensive means of ridding the insect of harmful, unpleasant or irritating liquids. Others believe that it in some way benefits the bird's plumage; at one time the most popular theory was that the formic acid acted against feather-lice and other external parasites, but this is now largely discredited. Yet other naturalists see anting as a form of sensual indulgence or pleasure and speak in terms of intoxication, perfuming and sensuality. Recently the view has been expressed, and well received, that anting is induced mainly by the thermogenic properties of the ant, which 'burn' the bird's mouth when it picks up the insect.

We gave several kinds of ants to my pet Pekin robin on many occasions. When he received his first of the season, a yellow ant, he immediately anted with it; and he repeated the performance moderately well with about half of the initial batch of thirty but thereafter usually ate this species without anting. He preferred the garden ants, with which he would perform quite frequently, especially if he could hunt them on a branch along with the black aphids they were milking. The jet-black ant was still more effective, causing him to posture and contort intensely when applying it; but he evidently did not like its taste and, when not in anting mood, would reject it with apparent disgust. The three Formica species induced the best anting performances, especially the wood ant. Single individuals were applied up to twenty-three times, until not a drop of fluid remained. The common red ant, on the other hand, proved to be unacceptable. The Pekin robin would not ant with it and, though he ate a few

workers at first, he afterwards largely ignored them, often 'scolding' me when I offered them to him.

We also sampled these various kinds of ant ourselves by crushing individuals in our mouths and by allowing them to spray their acid on our tongues. Both worker and queen yellow ants produced quite a sharp but not unpleasant acid taste, rather like lemon crystals -- more prolonged if we let the insect crawl about and squirt on the tongue. There was no impression of heat. We received the same acid flavour from all the other Formicine ants. However, we soon stopped letting ants crawl on our tongues because, when removed, they often left their jaws firmly embedded; and the larger species could hurt.

From late July onwards we had the tame song thrush indoors (as I write he is tugging at the tassels on the carpet). From time to time I gave him ants we had collected, first the jet-blacks when he was twenty-three days old, then the slave ants, the robber ants and the large queen garden ants. When he was thirty-five days old, we tried him with wood ants. Anting often appears first in young birds at about this age, but not once did the thrush perform, though he found all the species to his taste in spite of the acid. I had begun to despair that he would ever ant until, when fifty days old, he immediately did so with first worker yellow and garden ants he had seen. Four days later he performed also with wood ants, since when he has not done so again.

As the summer progressed I kept a frequent look-out for birds anting in gardens and parks but did not see one behave thus, though many obviously had the opportunity to do so, especially with garden ants. I came across any number of these in most places where starlings, blackbirds and song thrushes were foraging. Quite clearly the birds, all well-known anters, were recorded for common red and yellow ants. Indeed I had seen one cock blackbird dig up the side of a yellow ants' hill early in the season; he uncovered a few workers and then, most disappointingly ate them without anting. I tipped some of these ants into the garden and, although they were overlooked by most birds, a few were eaten by a starling and a house sparrow; in the end a most unkempt cock blackbird had most of them. On another occasion a robin ate many, also without anting.

It would seem then that anting is uncommon in the wild; but clearly for many kinds of bird there are special circumstances which induce it. It seems to occur during periods of swarming, at least with the smaller dairying ants. The swarm -- that is, the workers collect together and mill excitedly about in a greater concentration than usual -- on two main occasions: when the nest is disturbed, and at the time of the marriage flight, when the winged sexes quit the nest to mate and found new colonies.

This view received support in two ways. On July 11 my stepfather, George Trenfield, uncovered an entrance to a garden ants' nest when mowing his lawn. He described to me later how a robin came down and anted in the active swarm just like my Pekin robin, which he had seen performing in the aviary. Then, on August 10, a humid day, my wife and I saw anting in nature while spending the weekend at a country house in Hertfordshire. Marriage flights of garden ants were widespread at the time, and we came across many winged males and females. Observing from the house with binoculars, we were lucky enough to witness the anting of three blackbirds during the day; each was performing at a nest of swarming ants, having come on them during the relatively short period when the winged sexes were emerging with numerous workers in attendance. Birds were ignoring routine worker activity, and robins, house sparrows, chaffinches, pied wagtails, green woodpeckers and others, as well as blackbirds, were feeding on the males and females which were landing on the lawns after flighting.

Although I was encouraged by these views of blackbirds' anting, I still realised that, if I was to observe more anting by birds in the wild, I would have to provide ants at suitable places, rather than wait indefinitely for more chance observations. We carried out an experiment in Gillmor's garden. We deposited nest debris and up to three hundred wood ants at a time near a bird-table and bird-bath which we could watch unobserved at close range. Ten kinds of bird came near these ants, and their reactions varied from active avoidance to full anting. Blackbirds, robins, starlings, nuthatches and blue tits all ate at least one ant; but house sparrows, song thrushes, great tits, dunnocks and chaffinches kept right away, some individuals showing extreme caution and fear. Only starlings and blackbirds ate the ants in any quantities and both anted more than once. A young robin also performed thus confirming my stepfather's record, which was the first for the robin), as did a young blue tit, another rarely observed anter. A young song thrush came, looked at the ants from a distance and then performed anting movements under its right wing without an ant in its bill. But the starlings were the prize anters. Up to four or five at a time would turn and contort, applying ant after ant until their bills were packed with great wads of the crushed insects. These were quivered down the primaries, which sometimes glistened noticeably, saturated with acid. All the while the birds vigorously stamped their feet, as if to prevent ants from swarming on to their bodies; and every now and then they would rub head on shoulder, blink and scratch, as acid was squirted in or near the eye.

Such is the plain tale of some of this season's results. What has been achieved? If only for the fact that birds were seen using identified kinds of ants, the work was well worth while. The ant species used by birds in the wild have rarely been distinguished, and no ornithologist had previously experimented with so great a variety. Our tests on the flavour of the Formicine ants showed that they do not have a persistent burning taste, and this suggests that heat as such is not the all-important factor it was thought to be in anting. Instead, there is a characteristic and not unpleasant acid taste, though it is not clear just how significant a role it plays.

My study of the precise movements of birds in applying ants has convinced me more than ever that the behaviour is related to preening and is in some way similar to normal preen-oil anointing. The most important discovery this year was that the typical anting movements of most birds are almost identical with those used in oiling the wings after bathing. In the one case acid is applied, in the other preen-oil, mainly to the tips of the primaries, which are extremely difficult to preen effectively. The sideways spread tail could be seen acting as a stay to make the wing-tip more rigid for the anointing. But much work remains to be done before we can hope to understand fully the mysteries of anting.

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#### FIELD CHARACTERISTICS

By

J. N. McKelvie

My wife and I were recently staying at Kumardhubi on the Bengal-Bihar border and on a single day two instances of misleading or inadequate field descriptions in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS came to my notice.

On the morning of 9 September, 1966, we were walking in rough scrubby country close to the Panchet Dam when we saw a small party of Ashy-crowned Finch-Larks (Eremopteryx grisea). At the time I noted in my diary that they were black on the breast and throat, the black being described as 'blackish-brown' and 'blackish'.

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grey. When I later looked up this bird in Whistler's POPULAR HANDBOOK it was disconcerting to read that the darker plumage is 'chocolate-brown'. Had it not been for the picture on p. 232 (second edition) I should have queried my own identification but I was relieved later to find that in his THE BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS Salim Ali clearly describes the underparts as 'black'. This is certainly what it looked to the naked eye.

On the evening of the same day I visited the Maithon Dam, some miles away on the other side of the Grand Trunk Road. My wife and I found ourselves listening to a sweet and sustained song which we soon trace to a Large Pied Wagtail (Motacilla maderas-patensis) which was perched on a heap of stones or rocks a few yards from the water. The song was something between the twittering of a skylark and the much of a song thrush, a clear whistling call of great variety and charm. Hugh Whistler certainly does not do justice to this in his brief description 'there is a short musical song' but Salim Ali gets closer with his 'the male sings sweetly' during the breeding season. Even this hardly conveys the song as I heard it, and would September be the breeding season anyway?

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### THE BLACKHEADED ORIOLE (ORIOLUS XANTHORUS)

By

J.N. McKelvie

This Oriole is a common bird in Calcutta gardens (more common in my experience than Oriolus oriolus) and this year we were fortunate enough to have a pair nesting in our garden in Alipore. I am indebted to Mr. L.A. Hill of Bolani in Orissa who was staying with me at the time and who is an occasional contributor to your pages, for locating and identifying the nest on 21 April 1966, about 20 ft. up in a Gliricidia maculata. After Mr Hill had left, my wife and I watched for developments and it was in early May that we first saw the parent birds feeding the young in the nest. On 18 May, Mrs. McKelvie saw one fledgling being fed by the parent birds; it had moved from the nest and was on a branch a few feet below it; the young bird was very drab in appearance and had a crawny neck with no feathers on it. The parents were relentless in their attacks on crows whenever these came too near, dive-bombing and chasing them fearlessly and uttering a most unmusical but threatening hissing sound, quite unlike their normal fluting call.

Both parents were observed on 19 May, and the same hissing (warning ?) note was heard; the young bird was not seen. On 20 May the young oriole appeared to have found its way to a Rain Tree on the other side of our lawn, still jealously guarded by the parent birds. On 21 May I saw the young bird being fed by the parents, and noted the same attacks being made on any crows that approached too near. On 23 May both parent birds fearlessly harried a common Pariah Kite in the same way. During this time the young bird appeared weak and defenceless but on 4 June, when I next recorded a clear view of it, the neck feathers had grown, the breast had acquired streaky marks giving it a tawny appearance and the bird had evidently reached a stage when it could more or less look after itself. The deep black of the adult bird was markedly absent, except in a very restricted area of the head. On 9 June the young bird was seen for the last time, more mature still but with one parent bird still in attendance (but not feeding it). At this stage the bill had not yet acquired its familiar orange colour.

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By

B. J. Dangre

While I was reading the old records of this city and of the district Ahmednagar during last month, I came across a page entitled - 'The fauna of the district' and found that the description claims the presence of the Great Indian Bustard in this district.

So I was very eager to see the bird. I asked Mr Mathew Sonaware, our laboratory assistant, to accompany me, as he is well ~~known~~ acquainted with most of the villagers of this district.

We both set off for the area as was described in the records on 6 October 1966, crossed the distance of nearly six miles and reached the village Araugaon. We refreshed ourselves in the roadside village canteen and Mathew inquired there about the birds. We got the information that the bird known here as karduk or maldhok is seen at times and the description thought not correct gave us the idea that it was a large bird. We decided to try our luck. We requested the boy who described it to us to come along with us and show us the place where he saw the bird.

He took us nearly two furlongs deep near the old firing range. These ranges are to the east of the river names Mendhaka. From these range hills he showed the site. I took out the binoculars and kept them at the ready. As we were walking on he stopped saying: 'Look there'. But we were unable to see anything.

I asked the boy to wait for us and we went ahead nearly a hundred feet and Mathew asked me to look at the left hand corner of the bajari fields. I carefully looked through the field glasses and I saw the Bustards.

There were two birds. The height was between 2 and 2½ feet and the coloration as it was black capped with white neck, brownish back, long whitish legs and most of the lower side white.

I could observe these birds for not more than three to four minutes as one of them ran the distance of nearly 8 to 10 feet and took to its wings while the other one followed it immediately

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#### ORIENTATION OF SUNBIRD'S NEST

By

Joseph George

While studying the nest construction technique of the Purple Sunbird in Dehra Dun it was found that out of 24 nests observed in one season, 13 had the entrance hole facing west, 7 north, and 2 each east and west (George, J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 55: 420). I also observed 46 nests in Baroda. Of these 16 faces west, 11 north, 10 east, 6 south, 2 south-west and one south-east (Pavc 2:71). He concluded that there was no preference to any particular direction in the location of the entrance hole.

On the face of it over 40% nests facing in one direction appeared significant. The data was therefore, presented to Dr V.J. Chacko, Statistician, Forest Research Institute, Dehra Dun, who very kindly carried out an analysis and gave the following conclusions

"There is no evidence of inconsistency in the direction of

entrance hole of the nests between the two sets of observations.

"The hypothesis that the entrance hole facing any of the four directions is equally likely is not true.

"George's observations show that the preference is towards west as compared to east or south. However, there is no significant difference between west and north directions. These conclusions are corroborated by analysis of the combined data of the two observers.

"The number of observations should be larger to find out whether there is a definite directional preference."

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#### NOTES AND COMMENTS

Last month we celebrated our IXth Wild Life Week. On that occasion the Government of Maharashtra distributed a leaflet, the text of which is reproduced below:

"We have by now celebrated nine Vanya Prani Saptahas so that it is unnecessary to explain again what their purpose is. It is clear to everyone, that wild life and wild nature has to be preserved for aesthetic, scientific, economic and moral reasons. It would be more to the point to determine exactly what we propose to do, during the coming months, to implement the objectives about which we are all agreed.

"With the industrialisation that is taking place in Maharashtra, and the great pressure that is building up on the land, due to increasing population, the position of wild life will become more and more precarious. The most important step that we can take for preservation of wild birds and animals is to ensure that their habitats are not disturbed. Every animal has its own special requirements. The Sambhar and the four-horned antelope need thick forest cover, black-buck needs scrub and open grassland, panthers and tigers live in jungles where they can rest during the day, and hunt by night. The Cheetah unfortunately now reported to be extinct needs wide open country with moderate cover, where it can utilise its great speed in bringing down antelope, hare and other mammals. No species of life can survive for long until it gets both natural protection and adequate food from the environment.

"As with animals, so with birds. In spite of their great mobility, each species has very definite requirements, and some are extraordinarily selective about their environment. Some Flycatchers and Warblers live almost entirely on insects that are found among the top storeys of a tree; some find their sustenance around the middle storey, and others still prey on insects on the ground. Among waterbirds too, some prefer to feed on the water's edge, some in knee-deep water, and others go deeper still. It is, therefore extremely important for us to understand the ecological requirements of each form of life, for without this knowledge we will not be able to ensure its survival.

"Before we change the landscape of an area by cutting down a forest, or draining a marsh or diverting the course of a river, or inundating a valley by building a dam, we must study the entire complex of life and make an assessment of the total picture before us. By using our imagination, it is often possible to strike a balance between conservation and development. It is our duty to preserve the superb beauty of the landscape of Maharashtra, of its hills, estuaries, coast line and marsh lands, and yet go on with our development plans. This is a dilemma which is being tackled the world over, by associating biologists and scientists with the planning that is being done.



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"Let us take the example of the beautiful country and forests

around the Koyna Valley. Electricity had to be generated and industries established in that area. But at the same time, it is possible to preserve the forested tracts on the hillside, and to ensure that no undesirable structures are erected in the surrounding area to mar the natural beauty of the countryside. (The birds illustrated in this brochure will show what a variety of birds live in the forests and plains around Koyna and how much they can contribute to our enjoyment.)

"There are many forested areas in Maharashtra which need similar protection. All of us must play our part in preserving these areas and their inhabitants by preventing damage by illicit wood-cutters, and assisting the authorities in enforcing the Maharashtra Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act which is a very well thought out piece of legislation. Government is also considering the question of declaring more areas as National Parks and wild life sanctuaries on the advice of the State Wild Life Advisory Board. We have in our State only one National Park at Taroba and one wild life sanctuary at Karnala fort is being active pursued, which when formed will remain as a permanent nature reserve not only for birds but also for mammals like the four-horned antelope, the panther and langur, which could multiply there with a little encouragement and protection. These plans will only be realised if the public is whole-heartedly behind it, and takes pride in preserving the rich inheritance with which nature has endowed Maharashtra.

"The picture on the cover page shows the bulbul, a bird pet for its beauty and melodious voice; as a bird of love, it has figured in poetry."

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#### CORRESPONDENCE

##### About 'Kotur', the Coppersmith chick

This has reference to the comment of Sri D.N. Mathew on "Kotur's" behaviour in the September issue of the Newsletter. Of his four points two merit further consideration.

1. Sandpicking as exploratory activity: As for the exploratory activities kotur had enough but sandpicking seemed to have originated from an altogether different urge. It would come down to the ground only to select and gulp suitable grit, while exploratory activities such as pecking at bark, leaves and fruits of trees and playing mock-chase were confined to place above ground. Learning by trial and error does help the young to perfect the instinct inherited from its parents, but the instinct to descend and explore ground is not known to be existing in a coppersmith bird.

2. Colour perception in 'Kotur': I have repeatedly seen (though all the events had not appeared in the Newsletter) Kotur pay attention to red colour, yet I do not dare say, it could see red colour in the manner and extent we would. For the perceptive capacity of an organism is strictly restricted to serve its business of life and that ours is different from that of coppersmith's is clear. It is well to quote what R.H. Smythe says in his book ANIMAL VISION, page 174: ".... that colour vision and its origin have been subjects of an immense amount of experimental work, and of even a greater amount of argument, for the past two centuries, at least. The outcome of it all is that up to the present moment nobody can provide a complete explanation of colour consciousness and its mechanism."

T.V. Jose

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## The National Bird of Nepal

Sri S.R. Shah's letter (Newsletter, Sept. 1966, p. 9). The National bird of Nepal, DAGPHEY (g-nasal) in Nepali is Lophophorus impejanus. Some hill people near Gothavari call it NIL MOHR, which incidentally seems to be local name for the bird in Kashmir.

### References

- THE GAME BIRDS OF INDIA, BURMA, AND CEYLON. By E.C. Stuart Baker, Vol. 3, 1930.  
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J. Mangalaraj Johnson

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### 'Theen thara thithrric'

July-August means torrential rains, impenetrable grass, thick undergrowth of vegetation hiding the footpaths and leeches; not an ideal time for roaming around the peripheral scrub jungle and grassland.

Theen thara thithrric, the piercing call of the Black Partridge (Francolinus francolinus) stabbing the silence of the cornfields and the valley is irresistible and you automatically collect the binoculars and walk in the direction of the call. The bird often learning your presence before you could see it, vanishes from the place where you are focusing the binoculars to startle from a grassy river bed, some three furlong away. The bird it seems enjoys this hide and seek game and almost always is the winner.

The call is rendered also as sheer daram shakarak (Persian) and subhan teri kudrat. Dr Fleming renders it as pan beedi cigaret, the call one does not miss in the railway stations.

The bird gives out a milk trink 2-3 seconds before the vigorous theen thara thithrric. This trink is audible at a distance of 30 to 50 ft only. And sometimes is not followed by theen thara thithrric. Out of the 18 occasions I heard this season, three times it stopped with the trink.

J. Mangalaraj Johnson

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### Unusual mating behaviour of the crow

Shri Pratapchandran's note on the above subject in the October issue of the Newsletter was quite interesting. One can ask several questions about the 'corvine pyramid' he described. For instance, what type of a behaviour was this? I think this was some kind of mimetic behaviour. In gregarious species (Hinde 1961) performance of a particular pattern of behaviour by one member of the flock induces others to perform similarly. I think in this case the three 'extras' were all males. Pratapchandran (personal communication) noted that all the three extras tried to complete the motor pattern of copulation. The sight of a copulating pair may have released similar behaviour in the other three males. Again, if there was only one female, why did the three extras try to complete copulation? Animals -- if one follows the Lorenz-Tinberg school -- are not concerned with the achievement of a goal in the same way man does. The discharge of the instinctive act, in this case copulation with a fellow member in mounting posture consumes the nervous excitation, be that member biologically correct one or not.

Piling up into a pyramid was probably due to the fact that there was one common source of stimulus for all the three 'extras'. They copulated with a conspecific individual in suitable posture

around the Koyna Valley. Electricity had to be generated and industries established in that area. But at the same time, it is possible to preserve the forested tracts on the hillside, and to ensure that no undesirable structures are erected in the surrounding area to mar the natural beauty of the countryside. (The birds illustrated in this brochure will show what a variety of birds live in the forests and plains around Koyna and how much they can contribute to our enjoyment.)

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#### Unusual mating behaviour of the crow

Shri Pratapchandran's note on the above subject in the October issue of the Newsletter was quite interesting. One can ask several questions about the 'corvine pyramid' he described. For instance, what type of a behaviour was this? I think this was some kind of mimetic behaviour. In gregarious species (Hinde 1961) performance of a particular pattern of behaviour by one member of the flock induces others to perform similarly. I think in this case the three 'extras' were all males. Pratapchandran (personal communication) noted that all the three extras tried to complete the motor pattern of copulation. The sight of a copulating pair may have released similar behaviour in the other three males. Again, if there was only one female, why did the three extras try to complete copulation? Animals -- if one follows the Lorenz-Tinberg school -- are not concerned with the achievement of a goal in the same way man does. The discharge of the instinctive act, in this case copulation with a fellow member in mounting posture consumes the nervous excitation, be that member biologically correct one or not.

Piling up into a pyramid was probably due to the fact that there was one common source of stimulus for all the three 'extras'. They had to copulate with a conspecific individual in suitable posture and hence the 'pyramid'.

Food-begging-posture struck by the female before copulation if common, is biologically significant. One does not know if crows can distinguish a potential mate from an intruder. If they cannot, the first reaction on seeing a fellow member is likely to be aggressive. Here, the female can indicate her submission by taking a food-begging posture. An unnecessary fight is avoided. Pratap-chandran (personal communication) has noted food-begging before copulation on a few other instances. It will be interesting to know if the behaviour will be ritualised.

D.N. Mathew

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NEWSLETTER  
FOR  
BIRDWATCHERS

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E. Correspondence:

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BIRD BOOKS

By

R.A. Stewart Mellsuish

Nothing adds so greatly to the pleasures of field ornithology, and makes them meaningful, as the handling, study and regular use of satisfactory literature. Many bird books are intrinsically pleasant and beautifully illustrated; it is little wonder that far more people buy bird books for armchair contemplation than ever dream of doing anything more about birds or watching them than chucking a few crumbs at sparrows every day. Many will gloat over reproductions of the paintings of Audubon or Gould, G.E. Lodge or David Reid-Henry, who will never be found counting starlings going to roost, or optimistically climbing trees to delve into old abandoned nests full of droppings and slush. The joys of ornithological literature can be savoured independently of the more rigorous study of the living bird.

For the serious birdwatcher, however, his bird books are more than coffee-table or fireside diversions. They are valuable tools or accessories, often hard to be without. Indeed, they play so big a part in fixing the direction his studies take and the intensity with which he pursues them that their selection should be as deliberate and systematic as that of other far more costly pieces of equipment, like field-glasses and cameras.



What books are useful for the birdwatcher in India, and in what degree? This article is supposed to offer a partial answer. It is a review of some of the reference literature available and forthcoming which is relevant to birds in this country. It is not intended to be comprehensive because I have confined myself strictly to books systematically describing birds found in the subregion, and have said nothing about more discursive literary works such as Lowther's A Bird Photographer in India and Macdonald's Birds in My Indian Garden, however excellent they may be. I have also not discussed books on birdwatching in general and of inter-regional application, or those which deal with birds of other regions and yet are useful to Indian observers because species migrate or overlap from one region to another (e.g. Witherby's Handbook of British Birds). There are other omissions due to my own unfamiliarity with the books in question. To the veteran birdwatcher this may well be of no interest whatsoever; but there are many readers of the Newsletter whose acquaintance with ornithology is not of long standing and who would be stimulated to far greater activity and interest if they possessed good books to guide them, and knew their way around those which are only to be seen now in libraries or other people's homes.

The book to buy first, unless one lives in an area covered by a provincial survey, is unquestionably Salim Ali's The Book of Indian Birds. Wisely, this does not include everything. There are nearly 2100 species and subspecies of birds on the subcontinental list, and to illustrate all these in a handy inexpensive volume of portable size and to include adequate text under each entry is impracticable. Salim Ali restricts himself to describing 256 of the commoner birds to be found in every variety of habitat, and all the birds described are illustrated - not all, it must be said, with unqualified success - in colour. There are also numerous photographs. The author has chosen his representative selection of species shrewdly, and his descriptions are models of intelligent compression. It is remarkable how much he can say about a bird in a few short sentences. Salim Ali's writing on birds is always a pleasure to read; he gets the very most out of the English language, his style being lively and colourful and yet at the same time precise. He never forgets how varied his readers will be in their knowledge of his subject, and avoids pretentious displays of erudition and the horrors of writing down to the novice. His scholarship is impeccable. In the introduction and the 30-odd pages at the back devoted to nesting, flight, migration, the usefulness of birds, and birdwatching, he is at his very best.

Every user of this book could doubtless suggest improvements. The order in which the birds are dealt with is not the most up to date, even if the latest editions have acknowledged the fact and explained it satisfactorily. I have always thought a few plates of birds in flight, especially of duck and other waterbirds, and raptors - to show their upper and under wing and tail patterns - would greatly ease the observer's task of identifying our commoner birds. But costs prevent any great change in the layout from edition to edition, and compromises are unavoidable. This book is a fine achievement by any standards, and at Rs. 25/- it is very good value indeed. Any reader of the Newsletter who does not possess a copy really should at once make amends for this grave and deleterious omission as long as he has enough pocket-money left over afterwards to pay his subscription to this paper too. The Book of Indian Birds is published by the Bombay Natural History Society at Hornbill House, opposite Lion Gate, Apollo Street, Bombay 1-RR. It is now in its seventh (1964) edition.

Another useful book - by another meticulous craftsman, the late Hugh Whistler - is The Popular Handbook of Indian Birds, the 4th edition of which was revised by Kinnear and re-issued by Oliver and Boyd in 1963 at 30s. What follows may not apply to this latest edition, as I have not seen it; but earlier editions were decidedly attractive, a little old-fashioned in appearance (not a disadvantage), of great character and sterling worth. It is well illustrated with paintings and drawings by H. Gronvold. Only 4 of the 17 full-page plates are in colour, which is a pity, especially since the privileged 4 are so capably done. But the descriptions in the text



of the colours of plumage are detailed and greatly compensate for this economy. Some authors rely too much on their not always adequate coloured plates, and if a bird is pictured in colour they think it lets them off a full description. Whistler was not one to skimp his readers in this scurvy way. He was a diligent observer, and he lets others enjoy the full benefit of his experience.

The above are the only two books in print today which attempt systematic descriptions of the birds of the whole of India, and for anything else at all comprehensive one must visit libraries or scrounge around for older works now much dated: e.g. The Fauna of British India Including Ceylon and Burma (the bird volumes are seven, and were written by Stuart Baker and published between 1922 and 1930). This book is in the monumental category, and although any beginner who is offered a copy should pounce on it without hesitation (if he doesn't afterwards find a use for it he can always sell it to me) he may agree with Whistler who wrote, 'One search for a common bird in the volumes of the splendid Fauna of India series is enough to send the inquirer away frightened by the mere wealth of material and by the technical terms in the descriptions.' Notwithstanding this comment I must add that as one's interest in the study of birds grows with closer acquaintance of them, so also grows the desire and need to refer regularly to, if not to possess, the standard authoritative reference book on the region one lives in. Indian ornithology has been blessed with three such standard works over the last hundred years: Jerdon's Birds of India (1862-4); Blanford and Oates' bird volumes in the Fauna of British India (1889-1898); and Stuart Baker's 'New Fauna' already mentioned. And now, happily, a fresh 'last word' is soon to be uttered and so to take its place in this progressive chronicling of Indian avifaunal studies. The first volume of the Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Ceylon, by Salim Ali and S. Dillon Ripley II, is already in press, and nine more volumes will follow it in the next few years. This series will be one of those fat juicy stupendous sets of reference books packed with fastidiously presented technical detail and multitudinous gorgeously coloured pictures, which all birdwatchers in India will want to own. The author's names - particularly the former's, with his long experience of writing popular books for the non-scientist - are a sufficient guarantee that this series will not daunt the amateur, in fact will hearten him and give him confidence, while at the same time it will offer the more technically-minded everything he could ask for. Of course it will not be the last word; the authors are well aware that there cannot be a final unalterable verdict on most ornithological phenomena; but it will say all that can now be said at the present rudimentary stage in the progress of bird studies in India.

So much for descriptive books covering India as a whole. There is one other all-India book still obtainable, a check-list, which everyone should know about even if many may not need to use it very often - Ripley's A Synopsis of the Birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Ceylon, published by the Bombay Natural History Society in 1961 and costing Rs.25/=. This is a list of all the species and subspecies known to India, either as common residents or visitors, or as accidental vagrants. They are classified in the scientific order now most widely accepted (i.e. starting with the 'lowest' forms of bird life, the poor Loons and Divers, and working up to the more highly evolved ones). The Synopsis presents a still largely upto date assessment of the racial variations within species, and of the allocation of species to genera and families. It is useful in showing at a glance the English and scientific names of all the species and subspecies one is ordinarily ever likely to see in India, with a brief note on the status and range of each. It contains a few maps, but no pictures of birds.

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The remaining books/fairly recent authorship which describe and illustrate birds are provincial studies. Their regional bias does not however mean that they are quite useless to anyone outside the areas they nominally cover. Here is a list. It is not complete, because I do not want to mention books I have not seen and learnt to appreciate myself. If any reader of the

Salim Ali's Indian Hill Birds (1949, Oxford University Press, Rs.35/=) is a most attractive pocket-book with a lively text and 64 coloured plates by G.M. Henry. The birdwatcher who visits ghat-country or a hill-station without a copy in his baggage or better, I suppose, pocket, handicaps himself needlessly. Even if the sholas are silent and empty, and mist smothers every view, he can enjoy looking at the pictures and reading about what he might have seen. This book is in print, and costs Rs.35/=. Also by Salim Ali, and published by Oxford, are The Birds of Kutch (1945), The Birds of Travancore and Cochin (1953), and The Birds of Sikkim (1962) - the last containing some particularly good coloured plates. These three can now only be obtained secondhand; but The Birds of Travancore and Cochin will shortly re-appear in a revised and enlarged edition under the title Birds of Kerala. The Exceeding Birds of Kashmir, by R.S.P. Bates and E.H.N. Lowther (1952, Oxford, Rs.30/=) and A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon by G.M. Henry (1955, Oxford, Rs.35/=) are two more highly competent studies not to be neglected by anyone living anywhere near the areas they deal with. They are still in print. Being normally confined to southern India I have rarely had recourse to the former, but at Madras I am constantly using Henry's book and would warmly recommend it to birdwatchers in southern peninsular India. G.M. Henry is an outstanding bird painter and draughtsman, and his pictures make this guide one of those cherished companionable volumes that can be returned to again and again in those moments of agreeably exhausted repose at the end of a long day's walking in the sun, and it never ceases to please. The text too is illuminating and reveals the wisdom of a lifetime's careful observation in the field.

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I do not know whether Birds of Saurashtra, written and published by R.S. Dharmakumarsinhji (1954), is still in print. I hope so, because it is well worth possessing. It is a book of sumptuous expansive type, with generous broad margins and a serene, leisured look; particularly good are the black and white photographs, many of them by the author himself, which follow the paintings. It describes many birds common to other parts of lowland India, and could certainly be useful outside Saurashtra. Of similar extralimital use is Smythies' Birds of Burma (2nd ed., 1953, Oliver and Boyd, 84 s.). This is shown as in print in Whitaker's British Books in Print 1965 so may well still be obtainable. I quote the reviewer who concluded his notice in the April 1954 issue of the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society with the following words: 'Finally I strongly advise people to order the book, look at the Jungle Cock on the dust cover, open the book in the middle and feast on the beautiful plates and promptly pay the bill without letting the first glow of excitement fade. They can later find the money by giving up smoking for a year. Their health will not suffer and they will be in possession of one of the finest bird books published anywhere in the world.'

Mention of the Journal reminds me that the back numbers of this publication, which has appeared without a break since 1886 and is now in the 63rd volume, are the godown in which is embedded by far the greatest store of information about Indian birds, as well as about other forms of animals and plants. In their pages will be found accounts of numerous provincial surveys of bird life, such as 'The Birds of Bombay and Salsette' by Salim Ali, Humayun Abdulali, and Hugh Whistler (1939-40), and Whistler and Kinnear's report on their survey of the Eastern Ghats (1930, 1933-7), which is still the only satisfactory published study of the birds of the eastern half of peninsular India and should be examined by all birdwatchers in Andhra and Madras, and perhaps the states which adjoin them too. Then there are numberless letters and notes from correspondents which go to make the Journal a kind of Aladdin's cave of treasure. Its entrance is usually to be found buried deep beneath the matted thickets and scrub-and-bush jungle of public libraries. It is well worth hacking a way through the undergrowth now and then and spending an hour or two in sweating communion with its riches. It is also advisable to spare one's porters such effort and by joining the Society obtain new issues of the Journal for oneself every four months. A subscription costs Rs.30/=. It is true that some issues barely recognise the existence of birds at all, being morbidly devoted to such irrelevancies as the pre-coital posturings of

snails, or the number of bristles on the big toe of a new kind of louse; but one must learn to take the rough with the smooth, and frequently very useful ornithological notes appear.

Lastly, a brief word about buying books. Theoretically, any bookseller worthy of his calling ought to be able and willing to supply any book which is still in print (i.e. of which the publisher holds unsold stock or which he is reprinting or proposes to reprint). If the bookseller does not have a copy in his own stock, he ought to be prepared to order it, from abroad if necessary & if the import trade control procedure permits, for any bona fide customer. Unhappily not every bookseller will take the trouble to order unstocked books - it is often far easier for him to shake his head and say 'not available', whether he has heard of the title or not - and there are sometimes perfectly respectable reasons why the best of booksellers cannot satisfy their customers. If frustrated the customer should not give up hope but should write to the publishers and explain his difficulty. Whatever authors may say to the contrary, somewhere in the lower regions of their systems, often modestly hidden from view, publishers usually have a residual urge to barter their wares for gold.

Books which are out of print are much more difficult to come by, but a secondhand bookseller, of which there are a number of good ones in India, can often work miracles.

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#### BIRDWATCHING IN KOIABA DISTRICT

By

Zafar Futehally

On Sunday 20th November Stewart Melliush and I wandered about near Alibagh and Dharamtar Creek in the Kolaba District. I will try and report on the more interesting birds that we saw. As I have reported in an earlier issue of the Newsletter this area provides<sup>an</sup> excellent habitat for a variety of birds. The sea coast bordered with a picturesque line of casuarinas and has formations of black rock in many places where the patient pond heron and the impatient gullbilled tern can both be seen with the spray from the sea wetting their feathers. Behind the sea coast there is some forest where the ungainly grey hornbill and the elegant golden oriole are always around. At this season there were several paradise flycatchers hawking insects among the high banyan trees. Behind the forest, again, there is a wide marsh where before sunset a dozen golden plovers stood motionless almost asleep and it was only through Stewart's telescope with 25 magnification that we could see them sufficiently well to be certain about their identity.

We started after a leisurely breakfast at 9 a.m. and as we were walking along a dusty path bordered with lantaras, Urdi, euphorbia and casuarinas a brownish bird landed on the ground in front of us and quickly disappeared into a near-by tree. Both from the appearance and from the fact that the number of Redwhiskered bulbuls, tailorbirds, and others started to scream we thought it was a shikra. Soon however it came into view again and with the slanting rays of the morning sun we got an excellent view. It had a weak yellow bill and a long drooping tail and we surmized that it was a cuckoo of some sort. The two white lines on the tail and the other on the nape were confusing but after seeing specimens in the Bombay Natural History Society and after checking up with the books we came to the conclusion that the bird was the Common Hawk Cuckoo, the Brain-fever bird. It was completely silent. Otherwise it would have been much easier to identify the species.

It is both exciting and disappointing to run into a new bird which one cannot identify straight away .... disappointing because it shows up our ignorance, and exciting for obvious reasons. I have been watching birds in this area for the last ten years but had never come across the hawk cuckoo before.

Soon after our encounter with this cuckoo we came across a Pied Crested Cuckoo which is a species which should not have been here at this time. It should have migrated to its native land in Africa. As is well known these birds come to India with the SW. monsoon in early June and after perasitising our babblers depart for their wintering grounds by about October. From the fact that this bird remained practically in the same patch of jungle for about 20 months or so a thought crossed our mind that it might be injured and not fit enough to do the migration across the Arabina Sea. In the same patch of jungle there were purple rumped sun-birds, whitebacked munias, Tickell's blue flycatcher, whitebrowed bulbul, redvented bulbuls, black drongos, orioles. We heard the pleasant whistling of the spotted babblers and the not so melodious scolding notes of Franklin's wren warbler.

We came out of this mixed forest into a pure casuarina grove where years before I had seen the blackcapped kingfisher which I then thought was the handsomest bird under the sun. Every attempt to see it again has failed. A raptore suddenly came into view. In profile it looked rather like a pigeon apart from its large size of course. Again with the help of reference books we pinned it down as a Honey Buzzard. Stewart's capacity to make sketches on the spot indicating terminal and subterminal bands on the tail, the shape of the wings, the type of head, flat or rounded, is a great asset and much more effective for subsequent indentification than the conglomeration of loose words on which I am dependent.

In the evening before returning to Bombay we spent a little time near Dharamtar Creek. As the steno is getting impatient to go home I cannot dwell too long on the many birds which I saw here but I must mention the Hen Harrier of which we got a superb view from fairly close quarters. The country on both banks of Dharamtar Creek is flat and treeless, and gives an excellent view of the high flying species which patronize it.

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#### SOME COMMON MIGRANTS IN CALCUTTA AND WEST BENGAL

By

J. McKelvie

Those who live in Calcutta through the long hot weather look forward to the first signs of autumn not only for the relief it brings in climate but also for the greater variety of birds one may see in one's garden, on the golf courses or further afield. The arrival of the first migrants is greeted with pleasure as the first real sign that cooler weather is on the way.

In my garden in Alipore, the first autumn arrival this year (1966) was the Brown Shrike (Lanius cristatus). He reappeared on 17 September, bold and prominent on the top of a jammun tree, after an absence of some five months; I had last recorded him in the garden on 8 April on a hot day, but he may well have been with us somewhat later as my observations were interrupted about that time. On the same day (17th) in September, I saw another Brown Shrike in a prominent position on a bougainvillea at the Tollygunge Club and another (or perhaps the same) bird in my garden in the evening. On 18 September I saw two more in the Botanical Gardens. It was obvious that the Brown Shrike had arrived and shortly afterwards I saw it again in the north of the State in Kalimpong (22 September).

The Common Sandpiper (Tringa hypoleucos) is often found on the mala at the back of our garden, which divides Alipore from New Alipore, but the first I saw in Calcutta this year was on a stony margin of the Hooghly River alongside the Botanical Gardens on 18 September. A week or so earlier I had observed a single bird on a small sandspit near the edge of the Maithon Reservoir, in the Damodar Valley Corporation area on the

borders of West Bengal and Bihar (10 September).

My wife and I awaited the wagtails with impatience. We had seen four White Wagtails (Motacilla alba) on 8 September on the road and parapet of the Maithon Reservoir (without being able to identify the race) and when I returned to Calcutta I went hopefully to the Tollygunge Club on 17 September expecting to find Yellow and Yellow-headed wagtails in their familiar place on the 1st and 7th fairways. I was disappointed, and did not see a single wagtail. Eventually we saw our first wagtail of the Calcutta season in our own garden on 29 September when a single Grey Wagtail (Motacilla caspica) alighted on the lawn about 0800 hours and fed for ten minutes or so. Another, perhaps the same bird, was seen feeding in the evening. On 1 October another Grey wagtail appeared, this one having either lost or not grown his tail, presenting the strange sight of a bird trying to wag a non-existent tail. It was joined a few minutes later by a second of the same species, this being fully equipped with standard-size tail, and the two fed alongside each other for a few minutes until the tailless one (which had shown signs of resenting the new arrival getting too close) eventually shooed it away into our neighbour's garden. The same tailless bird reappeared on 2 October on which day we also had a visit from a White wagtail which set me studying the excellent illustrations of eighteen wagtail heads opposite p. 254 of the FIELD GUIDE TO BIRDS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE and wishing some thing similar could be produced in India.

I mentioned Kalimpong in connexion with the Brown Shrike. I suppose being further north and of higher altitude, Kalimpong gets its migrants coming in weeks earlier than Calcutta but in four days there on 21-24 September I did not see a single wagtail. Flycatchers were the most prominent visitors and I had good views of the Greyheaded (Culicicapa ceylonensis), Little Pied (Muscicapa westermanni), and Verditer (Muscicapa thalassina). One flycatcher remained unidentified: it was slaty blue above, with a chestnut breast extending the full extent of the underparts except for a grey throat, and with a prominent white mark on the wing coverts. The bill was dark brown or black and the legs pale ashy brown. It was the white mark (patch rather than bar) on the wing that was especially clear and this feature was seen by Mr Brooks, Headmaster of Dr Graham's Homes, as well as by myself. I cannot find any flycatcher in my books with this mark.

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#### BIRDS OF COCHIN AND ERNAKULAM

By

N. G. Pillai

Given below, are a few additions to the lists of birds published for this area in the Newsletter (May, September, and November 1961, and June 1962).

##### 1. The Nilgiri Pied Bush Chat: Saxicola caprata

A single bird on the outskirts of Ernakulam, on the road to Trippunittura, perched on the wall of a roadside embankment in a stretch of rice fields. First and only time seen on September 27, 1965. A male with the white of the underside confined to the vent.

Apparently a straggler, as it is a bird associated with high elevations -- hills chiefly above 3000 ft.

##### 2. The Southern Indian Blackbacked Robin: Saxicoloides fulicata

A single female seen on April 10, 1966, near the northern end of the Willingdon Island, pecking at the rotten tip of a partly decayed stump. Later, chivied by crows and driven into a shed attached to an unoccupied house. Altogether a surprise, since the island with its marshy terrain is anything but the 'dry stony' type of country which is the preferred habitat of the bird.

##### 3. The Paradise Flycatcher: Tchitrea paradisi

Not common in this area. Heard a call for the first time on February 11, 1965 and later on the 24th. saw a chestnut plumaged bird with short tail at

Ernakulam. The bird was not seen nor heard again until February 9, 1966, when a chestnut bird with streamers was seen on a Muntingia tree, in the neighbour's compound. On March 27, a chestnut plumaged bird was noted on the same tree, but disappeared before I could make sure if it was the longtailed form.

4. The Malabar Large Racket Tailed Drongo: Dissemurus paradiseus

Noticed for the first time on 19.4.1964 on a tree at Edappalli about 7 miles north of Ernakulam. The very next morning, one was seen on a jak tree in the neighbour's compound for a few minutes before it flew away. Saw it again on the 13th of March 1965, on the same tree. Since then, the tree has been cut down and the bird has not been seen again.

5. The Rosy Pastor: Pastor roseus

First seen on a Muntingia tree on Willingdon Island on the 20th of January 1965 -- 3 to 5 birds. Again on the 7th of February and 1st of March 1965, the same number on a Bombax on the island.

6. The Indian Alpine Swift: Micropus melba

This magnificent swift was met with for the first time at Ernakulam on 18th of February, 1965. Thereafter it was seen almost every morning till March 26. Reappeared on February 24th this year and remained with us till April 2. Usually seen singly, but 3 to 4 birds were at times seen working the extensive waterfront from Tevara bridge in the south to Rama Nilayam (Kerala High Court) in the north. In this connection, Mr Ravi's note (Newsletter Vol. 4, Oct. 1964, p. 10) that the bird was observed in Guntur in January and February 1963 and again during the same period in 1964, in large numbers flying from the NW. to SE., but only in the evenings, apparently on their roosting flight, is of special interest. At Ernakulam the bird was seen only in the mornings.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

The Council of Nature in London brings out a monthly newsletter called Habitat. The name is appropriate for a publication which is devoted to Nature Conservation, because the preservation of Habitat is after all the most difficult challenge which naturalists are facing all over the world.

The English are well known for their love of nature and a single issue of Habitat gives evidence of the great effort which nature lovers in that country put into the 'cause'. Habitat of September 1966 refers among other things to:

A public meeting on the Tees Valley & Cleveland Water Bill will be held at the Caxton Hall, London .....the chair will be taken by Dr Bruce Campbell. The Tees Valley & Cleveland Water Bill will have its third reading in the House of Common on October 18 .... it will then go direct to the House of Lords for its first reading there and within the next ten days a new petition opposing the Bill will be submitted by a vast number of organizations interested in nature.

The Orkney Field Club are concerned about the precarious existence of a unique British sheep which can throw light on the evolution of some of our modern breeds.

The growth of interest in conservation in N. Ireland is shown by the success of National Nature Week

Last month's request for information on permanent or seasonal nature trails brought more than 60 completed forms.

The Monks Wood report outlines the research on toxic chemicals being done in Britain.

Observers round the coast of Britain will be going out each week for the next 12 months checking beaches and offshore waters for birds

The Youth Committee of the Council of Nature has organized natural history courses for youth leaders which have been well attended.

The Duke of Edinburgh has taken many photographs of birds and mammals and are being displayed in an exhibition of wild life. Sale proceeds of the photographs and the catalogue will go to the World Wildlife Fund.

Finally there is a note on the Bombay Natural History Society: "The above Society wishes to contact former residents and tourists coming to India to get their impressions on any aspect of the country's natural history."

Habitat is published on the first Wednesday of every month by the Council for Nature, c/o Zoological Society of London, Regent's Park, London N.W. 1. Readers of the Newsletter will find very interesting material in this cyclostyled bulletin.

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Members of the Bombay Natural History Society were recently shown WILD WINGS, a film about the Severn Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, England. Slimbridge has become world famous both because of the good work it is doing for rehabilitating vanishing species of waterfowl and because Peter Scott is the founder and Honorary Director of the Trust. The film is available with the British Information Services and it is willingly given to any group of persons who want to have it displayed. It is a film well worth taking the trouble to see.

One interesting fact revealed by the film is that geese have very strong social ties and stay together in families even in the non-breeding season. For this reason when geese are caught for ringing the entire lot that is captured together is released at the same time, but ducks are less dependant on members of their own tribe. So individual ducks are released as soon as they are ringed and recorded.

Birdwatching at Slimbridge is very hard work indeed. Naturalists on the staff cannot just sit back and enjoy the scene. When they are not involved in catching birds with nets powered with rockets they sit down and count how many times a minute geese and duck peck at the grass, what is the total quantity of food consumed by each bird, and so on. Counting the number of birds in any area is not an easy task and the film indicates how it can be done. Aerial photographs of the birds are taken on which lines are drawn dividing the photograph into convenient sectors for counting. By this means the results are very accurate.

Peter Scott visited Bharatpur last November, and made certain recommendations for improving facilities of this splendid waterfowl sanctuary in Rajasthan. We are awaiting (in true Indian fashion) for something to happen.

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